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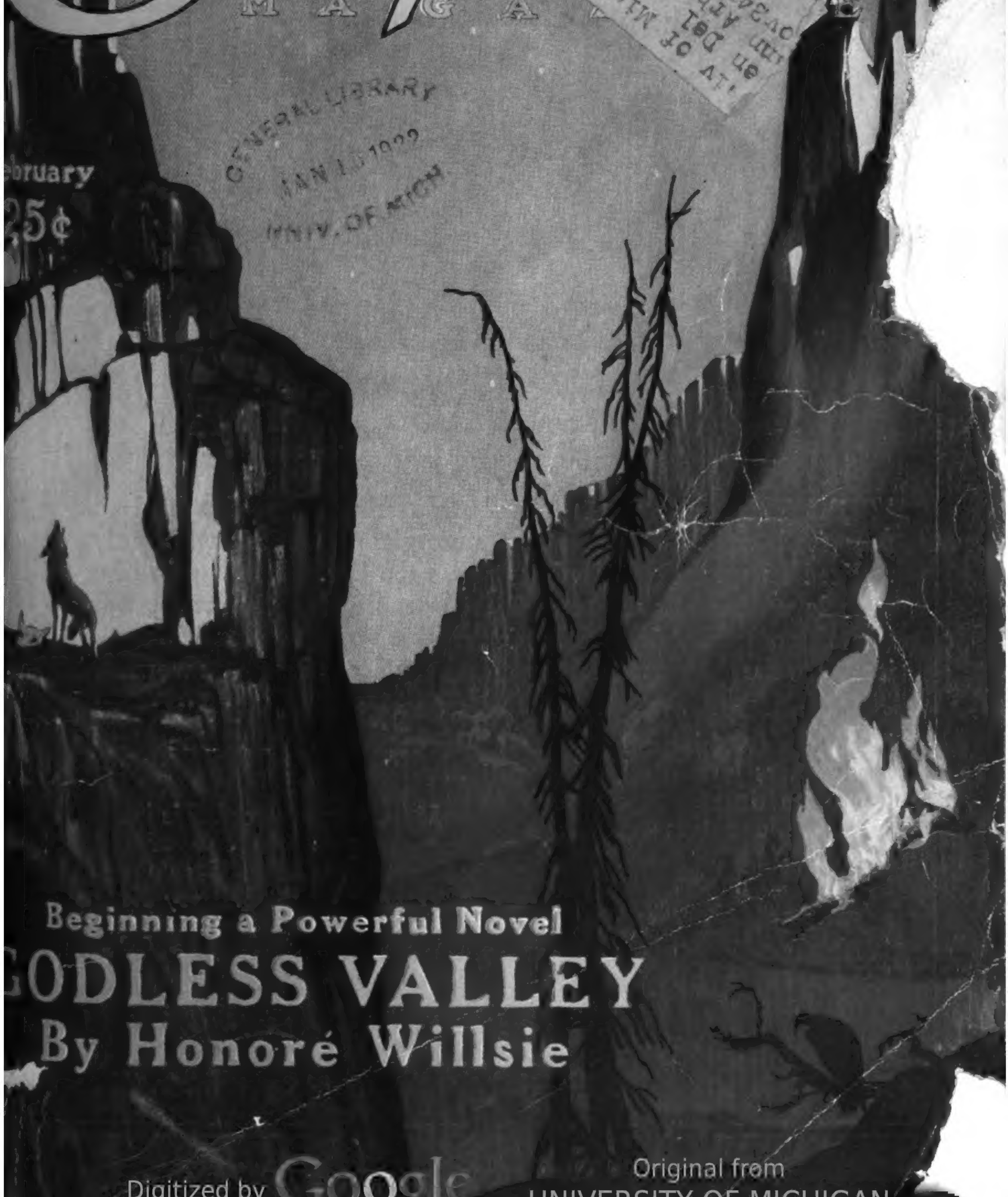

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ODLESS VALLEY

By Honoré Willsie

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Everybody's

NUMBER TWO FEBRUARY, 1922 VOLUME XLVI

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

CONTENTS

Godless Valley *A Serial* HONORÉ WILLSIE 4
First instalment of a stirring new novel
Illustrations by ERNEST FUHR

Wind *A Poem* HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE 32

Dicky's Continuity WALTER DE LEON 33
A story with a laugh in every line

The Magic Wheel STODDARD GOODHUE 42
Dr. Goodrich proves that the Goddess of Chance sometimes has feet of clay
Illustration by J. M. CLEMENT

Stop the Press! *A Complete Novel* OLIVER PECK NEWMAN 55
A girl and an editor set out to reform a town—and what happened
Illustration by DOUGLAS DUER

A Bill of Divorcement CLEMENCE DANE 92
A play with an intensely human appeal
Illustrated with photographs

The Black Horse WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT 99
A racing story with a big punch in it

Follow *A Poem* MARY STEWART CUTTING 110

The Mystery of Ravensdene Court *A Serial* J. S. FLETCHER 111
The trail leads in many directions
Illustration by HARRY FISK

Her Family HELEN REDINGTON 135
A girl decides that relatives are of some use after all
Illustrations by MEAD SCHAEFFER

(*Continued on next page*)

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Foraker's Folly *A Serial* **HAROLD TITUS** 147
New dangers threaten Helen's cherished project
Illustrations by **R. K. RYLAND**

Everybody's Chimney Corner 181
Where reader, author and editor get together to talk things over

Prose and Worse **GRIDLEY ADAMS** 183

Everybody's Chestnut Tree 185

Cover Design **LOUIS FLEMING**

Coming in March

You'll want to sit in this game—a game in a land where there's always tense, two-fisted drama when rivals clash in love or at cards.

The Satisfaction of Honor *A Novelette* By S. B. H. Hurst

The author of "That Lovely Bounder," "Dicky's Continuity," etc., now gives us Cissy, a demure but wise girl who got the breaks and—her man.

Short Vamps By Walter De Leon

What surprises do you think you'd run into if you had been put down as dead and suddenly returned home?

Even That Which He Hath By Bertram Atkey

Have you ever had an intense desire to join a campaign for humbling the arrogant?

Sauce By George Allan England

Dr. Goodrich draws a curious analogy between a supposed murder and a prize-fight.

The First Stone By Stoddard Goodhue

And there will be three serials as well as other features in

March *EVERYBODY'S*—out February 15th

Everybody's

NUMBER TWO FEBRUARY, 1922 VOLUME XLVI

Romance

THE Honolulu Morning Advertiser attacks Everybody's and Somerset Maugham because in his story, "Honolulu," in September, he discovered some things about that wonderful city that had escaped the writer of the editorial, an old inhabitant. In other words, Mr. Maugham is the lucky possessor of the faculty of seeing through the eyes of Romance—he saw Honolulu through the eyes of Romance and not through photographic eyes.

The difference is this: Mr. Maugham probably would not be very much interested in a photograph of the house of his next-door neighbor, but he would be interested in a painting of that house into which the painter had put something of his own—some touch, something that Maugham had not seen or felt before. His critic probably would prefer a photograph of the house—a photograph that contained only the drab details that he himself had observed.

To him we recommend the works of those writers who do not stop at saying a house is built of brick, but describe every brick without shifting gears. Also, we recommend to him the comment of the reader who sent us his editorial: "As my eyes went from one page to the next, they were greeted with a new thrill, a new phase of romance in these mystic isles."

A physician would not order change of scene for a broken patient if it were possible for the patient to see his old environment through new eyes. He orders a change that the patient may be entertained by fresh scenes, that he may be lifted out of himself. We believe that is what people are seeking when they read fiction. They don't want the camera-eye. They expect something more—something that comes only from the creative artist.

Everybody's will continue to publish the work of those authors who see through the eyes of Romance.

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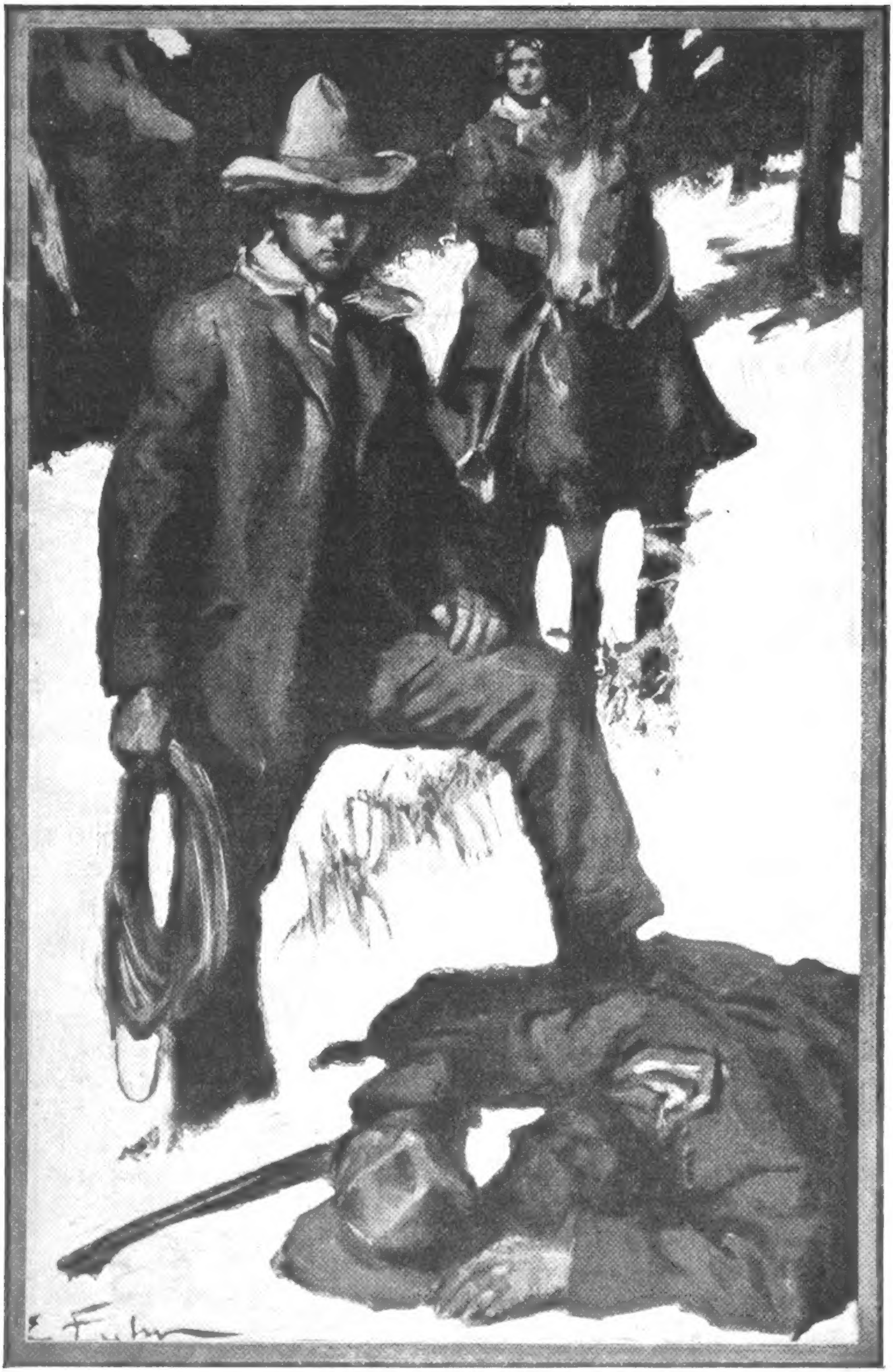


"Nothing will hurt him any more—poor old Jeff!" said Douglas. He dismounted and moved toward the body.

The Story of a Struggle to Be Decent—
A Story That Contains a Challenge

GODLESS VALLEY

A Serial in Four Parts

What Have You New Englanders Who Have Been Transplanted in the West to Say of Your Stewardship? What Have You to Say in Answer to this Very Vital, Human Novel Whose Scene Is Laid in the Rockies? Is It True?

By Honoré Willsie

Author of "Still Jim," "The Enchanted Canyon," etc.

Illustrations by Ernest Fuhr

DOUGLAS drove his spurs into Buster and finished the last hundred yards to the schoolhouse at a gallop. Judith stood up in her stirrups, lashed Swift vigorously over her flanks with the knotted reins, and when Buster slid on his haunches to the very door-step, Swift brought her bony fore legs down on his sweeping tail and slid with him, bringing up with her long nose under his saddle-blanket. The boy and girl avoided a mêlée by leaping from their saddles and jerking their mounts apart.

"Now, look at here!" shouted Douglas. "Some day I'll sure shoot that ornery cow-pony of yours if you don't keep her off from Buster."

Judith gave him a contemptuous stare, patted Swift's neck and, without touching the stirrups, leaped into the saddle. She then looked about.

"First ones here," she said complacently. "Even the preacher ain't come."

"I suppose"—Douglas's voice was bitter—"that if I rode over to Parson's to see Scott a minute, you'd have to come along."

"I sure Gawd would! Ain't my horse as good as yours?"

Douglas swept a withering glance over Judith's thin bay mare.

"That thing! Looks like the coyotes had been at it!"

Judith wore but one spur and this had a broken rowel, but she kicked Swift, and Swift whirled against the nervous Buster and bit him on the cheek. Buster reared.

"Take it back, you dogy cowboy, you!" Judith shrieked.

Douglas brought Buster round and smacked Judith smartly on the jaw.

"You just dare to follow me, miss!" he cried.

The two sat their uneasy horses, glaring at each other. Prince, a yellow, short-haired dog of intricate ancestry, crouched on his haunches in the snow, tongue between his teeth, eyes on the two horses. Perhaps Swift deserved some of the aspersions Douglas daily put upon her. She was a half-broken, half-fed little mare that Douglas's father had cast off. She hardly appeared strong enough to bear Judith's girlish weight. But, as the only horse Judith was permitted to call her own, the little bay was the very apple of the young girl's eyes, and Judith wheedled wonderful performances from her in endurance and catlike quickness.

Buster, Douglas's horse, was a black that his father had broken as a cow-pony, but had given up because it could not be cured of occasional bucking, particularly when it had been oat-fed for the round-up. Buster was nervous, irritable and unwilling, a joy to Douglas's sixteen-year-old heart.

Douglas sat tall in the saddle. He was, in fact, a full five feet ten inches without his high-heeled riding-boots. He was very thin. His leather rider's coat hung loosely on him. His sombrero, pushed back from his forehead, disclosed a thick thatch of bright-yellow hair above wide blue eyes that were set deep and far apart. His nose was high-bridged, his mouth still immature but full, with promise of strength in its curves.

Judith was fourteen, and a good five feet eight in height. She was thinner even than Douglas. She had hung her knitted cap on the pommel of her saddle, showing a mass of curly black hair tied loosely at her neck. She had a pug-nose, a large mouth, magnificent gray eyes and cheeks of flawless carmine. She wore a faded plaid mackinaw, a short nondescript black skirt, and arctics half-way up her long, thin legs.

"I hate you, Doug Spencer," she said fiercely; "and I'm glad you ain't my blood-brother!"

"I don't see why my father wanted to marry a woman with an ornery brat like you," retorted Douglas.

"I wouldn't stay to listen to you if you offered me a new pair of spurs! I'm going straight over to Maud's." And Judith disappeared down the trail.

Douglas whistled to Prince, who would have followed Swift, lighted a cigarette, and watched some distant figures approaching across the valley. Whether or not he saw the glory of the landscape it would be difficult to say. He had been born in the valley. It is probable that he saw only his schoolmates racing along the converging trails.

THE Rockies in midwinter! The Rockies with purple sage deep-blanketed in snow, with rarefied air below the zero-mark, with sky swept clear of summer dust, the purest, most crystalline deep sapphire. And Lost Chief Valley, high-perched in the ranges, silently waiting the return of spring.

Fire Mesa, huge, profoundly striated, with red clouds forever forming on its top and rolling over remoter mesas, stood with its greatest length across the north end of the valley. At its feet lay Black Gorge, and half-way up its steep red front projected the wide ledge on which the schoolhouse stood. Dead Line Peak and Falkner's Peak abruptly closed the south end of the valley. From between the two great mountains, Lost Chief Creek swept down across the valley into the Black Gorge, to lose itself in the weird mystery of the unknown cave beneath the mesa. Lost Chief Range formed the west boundary of the valley, Indian Range the east. They were just ten miles apart.

All this gives little of the picture Douglas might have been absorbing. It tells nothing of the azure hue of the snow that buried Lost Chief Creek and Lost Chief ranches. It gives no hint of the awful splendor of Dead Line and Falkner's Peaks, all blue and bronze and crimson, backed by myriads of other peaks, pure white against the perfect sky. It does not picture the brilliant yellow cañon wall which thrust Lost Chief Range back from the valley, or the peacock-blue sides of the Indian Range, clothed in wonder by the Forest Reserve. And, finally, it does not tell of the infinite silence that lay, this prismatic Sunday afternoon, over the snow-cloaked world.

Douglas, after smoking thoughtfully for a few minutes, gave a long "Coo-ee." It was answered below the ledge, and a young rider leaped from the trail to the level before the schoolhouse, broke into a gallop and slid, sparks flying, to the door.

"Hello, Scott!" cried Douglas.

"Howdy, stranger?" returned Scott. He was older and larger than Douglas, freckled of face and sandy of hair, with something hard in his hazel eyes.

There was a shriek, and a gray horse carrying a young man with the schoolmarm on his lap flew across the yard and reared to avoid breaking his knees on the steps. The schoolmarm scrambled down, still shrieking protests at the grinning rider. One after another now arrived perhaps a dozen youngsters, varying in ages from five to eighteen, each on his or her own lean, half-broken horse, each appearing with the same flying leap from the steep trail to the level, each racing across the yard as if with intent to burst through the schoolhouse door, each bringing up with the same pull-back of foaming horse to its haunches. And with each horse came a dog of highly variegated breed.

The young people had been racing about the ledge some time before the grown people began to appear. The women were dowdy in mackinaws and anomalous foot-covering, the men resplendent in chaps and short leather coats, with gay silk neckerchiefs, with silver spurs and embossed saddles.

When Judith returned with Maud Day, there were thirty or forty people, and almost as many dogs milling about the yard. The log schoolhouse had weathered against the red wall of the mesa for fifty years. There probably was not a person in the crowd who had not gone to school there, who did not, like Judith, love every log in its ugly sides. She urged Swift up the steps and sat shading her fine eyes with her mittened hand. Finally,

"I see the preacher coming!" she shrieked.

"Somebody'd ought to go in and build the fire if we ain't going to freeze to death," exclaimed Grandma Brown, jogging up, fat and competent, on Abe, a flea-bitten black mule.

"He invited himself. Let him build his own fire!" cried Douglas Spencer.

Charleton Falkner, a black-browed, smooth-shaven rider of middle age, turned to Douglas.

"Where's your dad?" he asked.

"Got a toothache and couldn't come."

"All right; I'll take his place, then. Did he bring you up to let a stranger come to the house and build his own fire?"

"No; but it's the schoolmarm's job to build this one," replied Douglas.

"Here you, Jimmy, and you, Doug—go in and get that old stove going!" ordered Charleton.

Both the boys scowled and hesitated. Charleton lifted one foot from the stirrup. Jimmy and Douglas tied their horses and disappeared into the schoolhouse.

"How long since Fowler was here before, Grandma?" asked Charleton Falkner.

"Ten years last fall," replied the old lady. "I should think the poor fool would have had enough then. Somebody's got to help me off of Abe. I ain't going to stay out here freezing till he comes. Riding ain't the novelty to me it seems to be to the rest of you."

Her dismounting was the signal for all the grown people to tie up their horses and enter the building. Shortly, Douglas and Jimmy came out. Hardly had they mounted their horses when the minister appeared, riding slowly up from the trail. He dismounted at the door and greeted the youngsters. They replied with catcalls. The minister stared at the group of robust young riders, his gray-bearded face somber. Then he shook his head and opened the door.

DOUGLAS dismounted and, handing the reins to Judith, followed the minister. The people seated within were quiet, and Douglas slid into a rear desk. Mr. Fowler dropped his overcoat on an empty bench and strode up to the platform. Here he smiled a greeting at his congregation and raised his right hand.

"Let us pray," he said. "O God, help me to speak truth to these people who, ten years ago, drove me from this room! Help me to open their eyes that they may behold You! Show them that they all lead a life of wickedness. They——"

"Tisn't any such thing!" interrupted Grandma Brown.

"If you've come here to preach old-fashioned fire and brimstone, Fowler," said Charleton Falkner, "you might as well quit now. None of us believe a word of it. We're materialists at Lost Chief. As far as I'm concerned, the only creed I've got is that the brain and the body are the twin joys of life, and that everything ends when they plant us in the cemetery yonder. That is, if they put enough rocks on so the coyotes get discouraged."

"Me, too, Charleton!" exclaimed Oscar Jefferson, rumpling his silvery hair with his soft white cow-man's hands.

The Reverend Mr. Fowler leaned over the desk.

"Charleton Falkner, aren't you man enough to admit that you folks here in Lost Chief lead a wicked life?"

"How do you mean, 'wicked'?" demanded Charleton.

"I mean that you steal cattle, that you shoot to kill, that there is indecency among your children, that your young girls go unguarded, and that your young men are no better than the wild bulls of the plains. I mean that you have murdered two sheepmen in the past year. I mean that your little girls drink whisky. I defy you to show me a mother in the valley who has taught her children to pray and to walk with God!"

"Aw!" sniffed Oscar Jefferson. "If that's what you've come a hundred miles to tell us, you'd better quit. That may do for foreigners and city slums, but it won't go down with the Lost Chief cow-man. We aren't soft enough to need religion here. We're all free-born Americans."

"Free-born Americans!" cried Mr. Fowler. "How much does that mean?"

Jefferson rose to his full six feet.

"By God, I'll tell you what it means! It means our ancestors first subdued the Indians in New England. It means that fifty years ago the father or grandfather of every man in this room came out here and fought the Indians and the wolves and——"

Charleton Falkner interrupted good-naturedly:

"Oh, Jeff, this isn't Fourth of July at Wyoming City. Give Fowler his chance."

Jefferson somewhat sheepishly subsided to the desk on which he had been sitting.

"That's why I came back!" cried the minister. "You in Lost Chief come of undiluted New England ancestry. This should be a valley of fine old New England ideals. A church should stand here beside the school. You never have built a church. You never have allowed a minister to settle here. You never——"

This time Grandma Brown spoke.

"If you're going to give us a regular Bible sermon, go ahead. Otherwise, I'm going home. I can jaw myself."

"Also, cuss some, Grandma," suggested a low voice.

Grandma did not seem to hear.

"If you're going to preach, preach," she said to the minister.

Mr. Fowler threw his head back.

"Ten years ago I let you people drive me out of Lost Chief before I'd preached a sermon. God has never let me rest since, no matter where I was, and when I was reappointed to Wyoming City, before I preached my first sermon there, I came out here. You are going to have the Word of God preached to you to-day if you shoot me for it. And beware lest you come to Esau's fate: 'For ye know how afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully, with tears.'" He paused, took a Bible from his pocket and opened it. "'Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Now thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou hide the guilty city? Yea, thou shalt show her all her abominations!'"

Douglas slipped out of the door, mounted his horse and nodded to the boys and girls waiting without. Then he urged Buster up the steps, through the door and up the aisle. A moment later, aisles and platform were filled with horses, whose laughing riders handled them masterfully. Dogs barked and fought among the horses' hoofs. Babies screamed. Oaths filled the air. Lost Chief roared with laughter.

Fowler jumped upon the desk, appealing in dumb show for order. A plunging horse tipped the desk over and the minister went down among the prancing legs. In a moment he was up, and again he raised both hands in a plea for silence. Douglas twirled his lariat, pinoned the two hands and, amid shouts of laughter, backed Buster from the room, leading the minister none too gently.

OUTSIDE, amid laughter and the ribald epithets of the youngsters, Fowler freed his hands, put on his overcoat and hat which some one tossed him, and mounted his horse. There he stood in his stirrups and pointed a trembling hand at Douglas.

"'Ye shall find no place for repentance," the minister shouted, "'though ye seek for it with tears!'" Then he turned his horse toward the trail.

"Run him! Run him!" shouted Douglas.

But Charleton Falkner put out a restraining hand.

"I guess that's enough, Doug. He'll never come back."

Douglas tossed his head defiantly, his yellow hair gleaming in the westering sun.

"Say," shrieked Judith; "let's all go over to the post-office and get Peter to open the hall for a dance."

This suggestion was greeted with acclaim by the youngsters, but the older people, one by one, made their way after Charleton Falkner.

"Anybody got any whisky?" demanded Scott Parson.

"I'll go over to Rodman's and get some, if Maud'll go with me," volunteered Judith.

THE little cavalcade, minus Maud and Judith, wound noisily down the trail, crossed the deep snows of Black Gorge, and broke into a wild race when the trail widened to the proportions of a road. The horses lunged and kicked through the drifts; the dogs barked; the girls squealed; the boys shouted. The post-office lay in the middle of the valley with neither tree nor house in its vicinity. It was a square log structure, two stories high, originally an inner fort built as a final retreat from the Indians. The upper room was now used as a dance-hall. The lower floor contained the post-office and living-quarters for Peter Knight.

The crowd of riders drew up, sparks and snow flying, just as Maud and Judith lashed their ponies in from the west trail. Judith waved a quart bottle of whisky. Boys and girls alike took a stout drink. During this procedure the door of the post-office opened and Peter Knight appeared.

He was perhaps fifty years of age, very tall, very, very thin, and as straight as he was thin. Thick, closely clipped gray hair stood up straight from his forehead. His eyes were deep sunk in his head and of a piercing light blue. He had a belligerent chin below an obstinate lower lip and a close-cropped gray mustache. He wore a gray-flannel shirt and blue-denim pants turned high over riding-boots.

"Hello, Peter!" called Judith. "Will you open the hall and let us have a dance?"

"What have you been doing to your horse, Judith?" demanded Peter, eying the panting and dejected Swift.

"Nothing."

"Nothing! I tell you what—the way you little devils treat your horses would draw tears out of a coyote! Starving 'em, beating 'em, running 'em! I wish I could catch one of you mistreating my horse. I'd shoot you, you worthless young slicks, you!"

Curiously enough, none of the group which had shown so much temerity in man-handling the minister now attempted to reply to Peter. A great shaggy gray dog, exactly like a coyote except that she was much larger, now appeared in the door beside the postmaster. There immediately began a chorus of growls and whines from the dogs congregated among the horses.

"Peter," said Judith, dismounting; "I want to speak to you, Peter!"

She mounted the steps and stood before the man. She was as thin as he and as straight. Peter looked down at her still scowling angrily.

"Now, Peter, listen! You know I love Swift and wouldn't hurt her."

"Wouldn't hurt her! Haven't I told you a hundred times that running a horse through drifts like you do ruins 'em? No; don't try to soft-soap me, Jude. I'm disappointed in you. There was a time when I thought you were going to develop a real brain. But I guess I was wrong. When you kids want a favor from me, don't come up with your horses dripping sweat in below-zero weather."

He jerked Sister back into the building and slammed the door.

Judith turned.

"Well, we can all go over to Inez Rodman's house. She asked us."

"Who's there?" demanded Douglas.

"Nobody. She says we can dance if we want to."

There was a silence, broken after a moment by Jimmy Day, a gangling youth of seventeen.

"You can't go, Maud! Remember, m. told you never to go inside Rodman's door."

"I'm going if the rest of you do!" exclaimed Maud. "Make him let me go, Doug!"

"What 's the use of being so fussy about poor old Inez?" asked Scott. "She tends to her own affairs better than any other woman in this valley. You never hear her knocking any one."

"I don't see why, if my mother don't care, your mother should, Maud!" cried Judith.

"Oh, your mother wouldn't boss a day-old calf," said Jimmy impatiently.

"Don't you knock my mother!" shrilled Judith.

"Your mother—" began Maud.

"Dry up, Maud, or I'll smack your mouth for you," said Douglas.

"No, you won't!" cried Jimmy.

"I will anybody that says anything against Jude's mother," returned Douglas promptly.

"Aw, if you kids are going to start fighting as usual, I'm going home!" growled

Scott Parson. "Every time we go anywhere, Jude has to start a fight. It's got awful cold, anyhow, and I got chores to do." He spurred his horse and was off.

"Me, too!" chimed half a dozen voices as more horses were spurred away.

Douglas glared disgustedly at Judith.

"That's right! You always are making trouble, hang you!"

"Let 'em not knock my mother or my horse or my dog, then," replied Judith, tossing her head.

"Your dog! Prince is my dog, miss, and don't you forget it for a minute!" shouted Douglas.

DOUGLAS spurred Buster on up the south trail, which lifted gradually toward Dead Line Peak. Judith, after a scowling moment, followed him. Prince set off, yelping, after a skulking coyote. When he had disappeared in a distant herd grazing through the snow, Judith pushed her horse up beside Buster.

"Doug, am I any scrappier than the rest of them?"

Douglas, his cigarette hanging negligently from a corner of his mouth, nodded.

"Well, I have to be, Doug," insisted Judith.

"No, you don't! You just look for trouble all the time. Why do you have to be?"

"Who is there to look out for me?" demanded the girl.

"What's the matter with me?" asked Douglas.

"Huh!" grunted Judith. "I'm not your real sister, and you never forget it, either."

The boy did not answer, and Judith rode in silence for a time, her thin young body sagging dejectedly in the saddle. The lavender twilight was gathering. White stars hung within hand-touch. Prince returned to the trail and a coyote barked derisively from beyond an alfalfa stack.

"Douglas," exclaimed Judith suddenly, "if I thought, when I got married, my husband would treat me like dad does mother, I'd never get married! Getting married in real life ain't a bit like the books show it."

Douglas gave a short, unboyish laugh.

"What do you mean by laughing that way?" cried Judith. "Are you laughing at me or my mother?"

"I'm laughing at you. You're such a fool! She's been my mother since I was five, and I think a heap of her."

"You're awful rough with her," persisted Judith.

"Aw, I'm just like any other fellow with his mother," replied Douglas calmly.

"When you're pleasant like this to me, Doug, I'm sorry for all the mean things I say and do to you."

"Well," said Douglas, "I guess we break about even on the meanness."

"I hope dad's tooth is better," said Judith, as dim buildings and a lighted window shone through the dusk.

"Are you really fond of dad, in spite of the fact that he licks you?" asked Douglas suddenly.

"Sometimes I hate him," replied Judith thoughtfully, "and sometimes I can see why the women folks are crazy about him. I can even see why mother sticks by him."

"Why? You used to say you hated him all the time."

"I'm growing up now," returned Judith.

"Growing up!" sniffed the boy scornfully.

But before Judith could pick up the gauntlet, the horses came to a pause before the lighted window. Judith jumped quickly from her horse, jerked off the saddle and threw it over a rack under the window. Then she went into the house, while Swift turned toward the water-hole beyond the corral.

Douglas unsaddled more slowly, then strode toward the corral, where calves were bellowing and cows lowing.

For half an hour he worked in the starlight, throwing down hay to the crowding cattle. It was so cold by the time he had finished that he hardly could turn the door-knob with his aching fingers. He entered the kitchen. This was a large room, with the log walls neatly chinked and whitewashed. An unshaded kerosene-lamp burned on the big table in the middle of the room. Judith was cutting bread. The air was heavy with smoke from frying beef. A tall, slender woman with round shoulders stood over the stove, stirring the potatoes. She turned as Douglas came in and gave him a quick smile. She was a very beautiful, very worn edition of Judith physically, but it is doubtful if she ever burned with even a small portion of Judith's eager, wistful fires.

"Cold, Douglas?' she asked.

The boy nodded.

"Where's dad?"

"In the other room. His toothache is over."

"Is he sore because I'm late?" Douglas was scowling.

Mrs. Spencer nodded, and Judith, with a curious jerking of her breath, said:

"He kicked me. Better stay out here."

But Douglas, paling a little under his ruddy tan, passed through the inner door into the one other room of the house. It was a large room, at least twenty-five feet square. The log walls were whitewashed like the kitchen and the roof was unceiled. From one of the huge pine-log rafters hung a lamp which shed a pleasant light over the center-table. Beds occupied three corners of the room. There were several comfortable rocking-chairs, a big Colonial mahogany bureau and a sewing-machine.

Over the double bed hung an ancient saber and a bell-mouthed musket. Over a low bookcase was a framed sampler. There were several good old-fashioned engravings and some framed lithographs, with several daguerreotypes. There were many books on shelves and the home-made bookcase, and many piles of dilapidated magazines. Douglas's father stood by the center-table with one of these magazines in his hand.

JOHN SPENCER at forty-five was still a superb physical specimen, standing six feet two in his slippers. His face, so like and unlike Douglas's, bore heavy lines from the nostril to the corners of the mouth and between the brows. Beneath his eyes were faint pouches. The thick thatch of hair had lost its yellow light and was now drab in tone. He wore a close-cropped mustache. His flannel shirt was unbuttoned at the throat, showing a thick, strong neck, and the rider's belt that circled the top of his blue-denim pants outlined a waist as slim and hard as Douglas's. He looked up.

"What do you mean by coming in at this hour, you young hound?"

"I think I might have Sunday afternoon to myself," said Douglas sulkily.

"So do I; but that don't mean you are to have all Sunday night, too. Did you feed Sally's calf?"

"Yes, sir."

"Next Sunday, you be here by five o'clock—understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Supper's ready!" called Judith.

The table was covered by a red-checked cloth. A huge platter of fried beef, another of fried potatoes, another of baking-powder biscuit and a pot of coffee smoked on the table.

"Well, children, what happened this afternoon?" asked Mrs. Spencer, after the family's first huge hunger had been satisfied.

Judith did not reply, but Douglas, with a chuckle, told the story of Mr. Fowler's discomfiture. John and Mary Spencer roared with laughter.

"Serves him right." John wiped his eyes. "What became of the old fool?"

"Oh, he beat it for the pass," replied Douglas.

"What did you do after that?" inquired Mrs. Spencer.

"We went up to the post-office to get Peter to let us have a dance, but there was nothing doing. He just gave us all a jaw because our horses were sweating."

"I'll bet Swift was the worst off," chuckled John.

"That's right! Pick on me!" cried Judith.

"Let her alone, Mary!" John's blue eyes were inscrutable as he watched the young girl. "She's kept out of a row about as long as she can without choking."

"Some day, when you least expect it," said Judith, with a little quiver in her voice, "I'm going to run away."

The others laughed.

"Where to, Jude?" asked her stepfather.

"To some place where folks like me."

"I like you, Jude!" exclaimed John.

Judith turned to him quickly.

"Why do you thrash me and kick me, then?"

"Kids have to be trained."

"No such thing!" Judith suddenly rose from the table. "It's just rotten bad temper you've never learned to hold in."

"Judith, Judith—don't!" cried her mother.

"Let her alone!" John's voice was not angry. He was eying Judith with the same inscrutable gaze.

"The next time you kick me, I'm going to run away. A woman, a horse and a dog—you don't kick any of them. Peter Knight says so."

"You're reading too many society novels, Jude," chuckled Douglas.

"Maud Day's father never kicks her. He hits her with a belt, maybe, when she doesn't get his horse quick enough. And maybe he hits her mother when he's been drinking. But that's all." Judith began to gather up the dishes with trembling fingers.

'How old are you, Judith?" asked John.

"You know. Fourteen last March."

"By Jove, you're almost a woman grown, Jude, and you're going to have all the warmth in you your mother always lacked!" John rose and went into the living-room.

Douglas followed his father and, sitting down on the edge of his bed, unbuckled his spurs. John settled himself under the lamp with his magazines, but he did not begin to read at once.

"Yes sir, Doug; that girl is a woman now. And, believe me, she's got any woman in Lost Chief beaten for beauty and nerve."

Douglas gave his father a startled glance. Then he said, with elaborate carelessness:

"Rats! She's still just a little fighting kid."

John chuckled.

"I'm glad you're still only a sixteen-year-old fool, Doug."

The boy did not reply. He scowled and sat staring at his father long after that strenuous person was absorbed in his magazines. Then he kicked off his boots, took off his vest and trousers and crawled into bed.

Not long after, Mrs. Spencer came in, glanced at her husband, sighed wearily, and then she, too, went to bed. Judith finished the dishes, sauntered in to the center-table and shortly was absorbed in "Bleak House." Mrs. Spencer was snoring quietly, and Douglas had not stirred for an hour when he heard his father say, in a low voice,

"Jude, honey, I'm never going to lay finger on you again."

Jude gave a little gasp of surprise.

"What's happened, dad?"

"You've happened. By Jove, Judith, but you're a beauty!"

"Douglas says I'm a homely, pug-nosed outlaw."

"Doug's just a fool. It takes a man that knows women like me to appreciate you, Jude. Doug's just a——"

"He'll hear you," warned the girl.

"He's been dead for an hour. Give me a kiss."

"I don't think I will; I'm too sleepy and tired. Guess I'll go to bed." She rose, dropping "Bleak House" as she did so.

Mrs. Spencer turned over with a snort.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I just dropped a book and I'm going to bed." Jude retired to her corner, and shortly she, too, was sound asleep.

But Douglas, new thoughts surging through his brain, lay awake long after his father had turned out the light and crawled in beside Mary.

THE next morning, while Doug was feeding in the corral, his father hitched a team to the hay wagon. Just as he prepared to climb over the wheel, Judith came out, ready for her ride to Maud's, where she was to spend the day.

"Say, Jude," called John; "I want Doug to go after Mike and Molly. You come up and help me feed the two-year-olds. I'm going to get all I can out of you two till school begins again."

Judith crossed silently to the wagon and climbed aboard. Douglas dropped his pitchfork and walked deliberately toward the fence. As he climbed it, he said:

"Judith, you aren't going. You keep your date with Maud." He dropped from the fence to his father's side.

John turned to him with a look of entire astonishment.

"Jude's growing up, as you say," explained Douglas heavily. "If you aren't going to look out for her, I am."

"Oh, you are! And why?" demanded his father.

"I don't know why," replied Doug candidly. "Jude, you get down and get started on Swift."

Astonishment, amusement, anger pursued their way across the older man's face. Judith put out her tongue at her brother.

"Chase yourself, Doug Spencer! You're not my boss, you bet."

John put his foot on the hub.

"Good-by, Doug. I hope you recover from your insanity by to-night."

Douglas put an unsteady hand on his father's shoulder.

"She can't go with you, dad!"

His father struck him roughly aside. Douglas ran round the wagon. Judith was sitting on the edge of the rick. He reached up, pulled her into his arms, ran her into the feed-shed, turned the key in the padlock and put the key in his pocket. As he turned, his father met him with a blow between the eyes. Mary Spencer appeared on the door-step, pale and silent.

It was but the work of a moment to subdue the boy and to unlock the door.

"Get into the wagon, Judith!" ordered John.

Douglas strode uncertainly to his father's side.

"Judith, you go get on your horse!"

The young girl stood staring at the two, something impish in the curl of her lips, something wistful and unafraid and puzzled in her beautiful gray eyes—John, with ashen hair, with bloodshot eyes and the telltale lines from nose to lip-corner, but handsome, dominating, choleric, with his reputation as a conqueror of women, as a subduer of horses, as a two-gun man; Douglas, with his thatch of gold blowing in the cold morning air, thin, awkward, only a boy but with a spirit glowing in his blue eyes that Judith never before had seen there. The girls of Lost Chief were sophisticated almost from the cradle. Judith could interpret the lines in her stepfather's face. But she did not know what the strange light in Douglas's eyes might mean. Suddenly Judith sprang to Swift's back and put him to the gallop.

"You know what to expect when you come back, miss!" roared John.

But Judith did not seem to hear. Spencer turned to his son.

"Now, sir, you go into the house and get the whip."

Douglas did not stir.

"You aren't going to whip me any more, dad. If you want to fight me, put up your fists. It was all right to lick me and Jude when we were little. But now I warn you I'm going to hit back. And you got to leave Judith and her mother alone."

John Spencer stood staring at his son. Twice he raised his heavy fist to strike him. Twice he dropped it. Douglas, still pale and trembling, was obviously afraid. Also, from the steady, burning light in his eyes, he quite as obviously intended to stand his ground.

"So you don't intend to obey me any more?" averred John.

"Sure I do!" replied Douglas. "Only, I'm not going to be licked into doing things, and I'm going to take care of Jude."

"You, blank—blank—blank—" raved John.

Douglas swallowed with an effort, then went on,

"I'd like to be as good a rancher and rider and gunman as you are, but I don't want any woman to be as scared of me as mother is of you."

"Think yourself a man, eh? Well, I'll tell you, young fellow, as long as you live in that house there, you'll obey and take the lickings I give you. My father built that house and I was born in it, and so were you. He men come from our breed, and only a sissy refuses to obey. I may not be as refined as my ancestors back East were, but I'm just as well trained as any of 'em, and you're going to be the same. We men boss our own households. You go get me that whip."

"No, sir; I won't do it," replied Douglas.

FOR a long moment there was silence. Then John gave a short laugh.

"Damned if you haven't got nerve, Doug! Go saddle your horse and get up the cañon after the horses. I want to dehorn in a day or so."

Douglas's lips parted; the color returned to his face. His father climbed into the hay wagon and drove off. Douglas stared after him for a moment; then he sat down weakly on the lower bar of the buck fence and burst into tears. Mary Spencer came running through the snow. She knelt in the muck before him and pulled his head over on her shoulder.

"Doug! Doug! You are a man!" she whispered. "You are a man!"

Douglas did not sob long. When he lifted his head, his mother said,

"Douglas, what happened?"

"Something he said to Jude last night," mumbled Douglas, "scared me."

Mary tightened her hold on the boy's arm.

"I've been so afraid, so afraid, and no one to talk to."

"Haven't you said anything to Jude?"

Mary shrank.

"Oh, I couldn't, Douglas!"

"Then I suppose I'll have to," said Douglas heavily.

"I never dreamed of this. I thought you were going to be like your father and the rest of the men. Oh, Douglas, to think I can lean on you!"

"I am like the rest of the men." Douglas's voice was a little resentful. "Only, I suppose I might as well tell you. I discovered last night that I care a lot about Judith. Some day I'm going to marry her. And from now on I'm going to guard her."

Mary searched his face wistfully.

"After all, you're only a boy, Douglas."

Douglas rose.

"Don't you tell what I've said about Jude, mother."

"I'd sooner cut off my hand," replied Mary Spencer.

Douglas picked a bridle from the fence and started after Buster, and his mother returned thoughtfully to the kitchen.

It was nearly supper-time, and Doug and his father were reading in the living-room when Judith returned. The wood-stove glowed red hot, and the smell of cedar mingled with that of frying beef in the kitchen.

Judith, without waiting to take off her mackinaw, cheeks scarlet, eyes brilliant, stood before her father.

"Here I am, dad!"

John looked up from his book.

"Have you milked yet?"

"No, sir."

"Go out and do it."

"I want to know if you're going to lick me, dad?"

"What did I promise you last night?" he demanded.

"Do you mean to keep that promise?" asked Judith.

"Go out and tend to your milking!" roared John, rising to his feet and throwing the book across the room. "Get out of my sight, you little fool, you blankety blank——"

But Judith fled, and Douglas retired to the kitchen.

Supper was a silent affair. But that evening, when the family had gathered under the lamp to read, Douglas said,

"Scott Parson wants me to take the mail-stage for him Wednesday."

"Where's he going?" asked John.

"Out after that bull which has strayed again."

"Huh!" grunted John. "Are he and Oscar Jefferson still fighting over that bull?"

"I guess so," replied Douglas. "Can I go, dad?"

"It will put the dehorning off another day, but I guess you can go. That extra money will come in handy. How would you like to drive the mail regularly next winter, Douglas?"

The boy tossed "Treasure Island" on the table.

"Do you mean you'd let me have it?"

"What would you do with the money?"

Douglas hesitated. Judith spoke.

"I know what I'd do. I'd put half the money into books. The other half I'd use to buy me some buckers, and I'd go into training as a lady bronco-buster."

Everybody laughed, and Mrs. Spencer said,

"You won't have time to keep your nose in a book if you start in that line, Judith!"

"I'll always read," retorted Judith loftily.

"I'd buy me a silver-mounted saddle and silver spurs," said Douglas, "and that dapple-gray mare of Oscar Jefferson's and a good greyhound, and I'd go into the wild-horse-catching business."

John groaned.

"We've sure got an ambitious pair of kids here, Mary. What about the money you get from this trip, Doug?"

"Will you let me keep it?" asked Douglas eagerly.

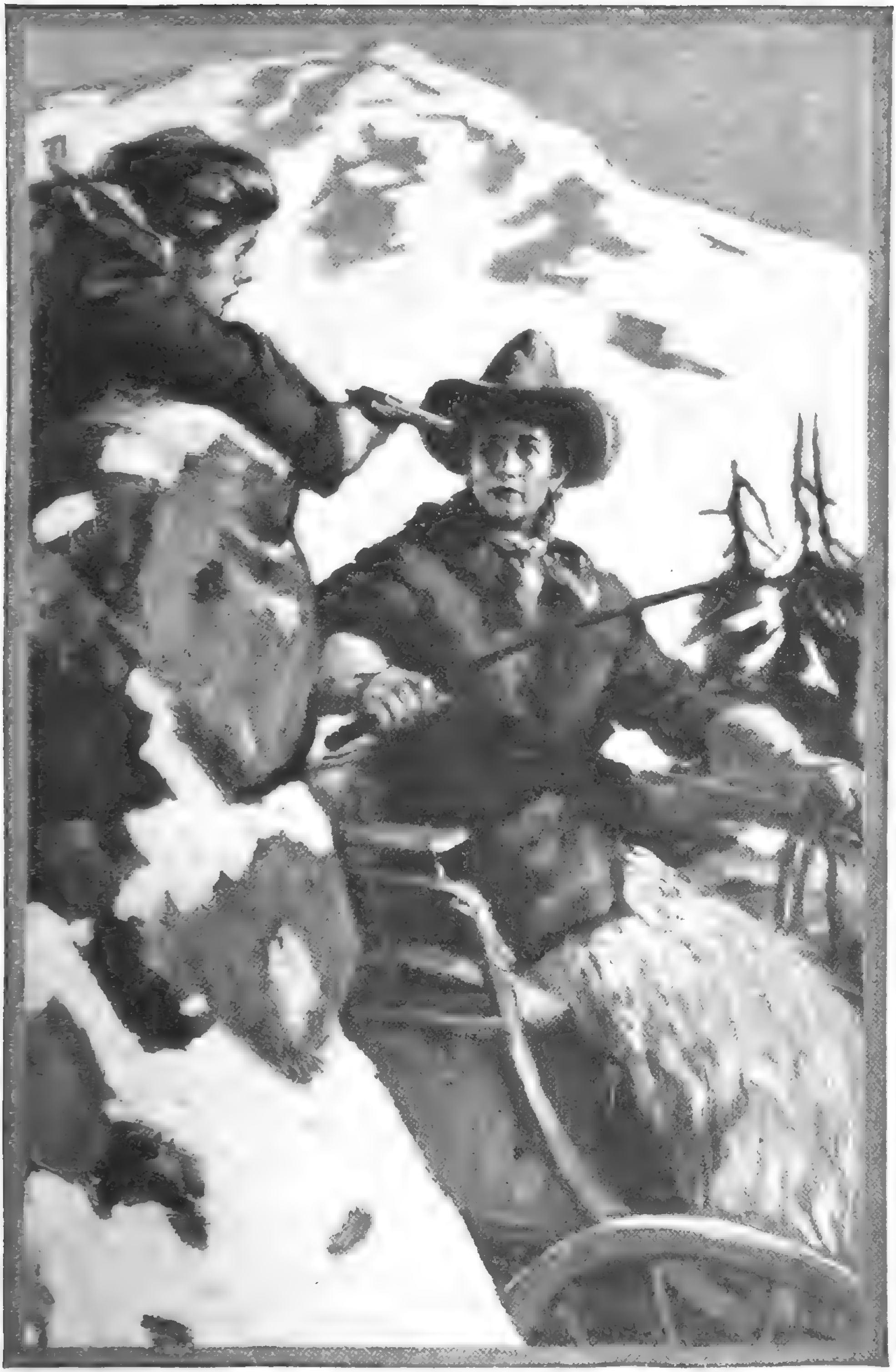
"I'll see." John picked up his book again.

"Let me go with you, Doug!" pleaded Judith.

"Nothing doing!" exclaimed her step-father succinctly. "You go to bed now before you get me aggravated."

Judith tossed her head, but obediently retired to her corner of the room, undressed and crawled into her bed. Douglas was not long in following her example.

IT WAS about eight o'clock Wednesday morning and below-zero weather when the mail buckboard driven by Douglas took the rising trail from Black Gorge eastward over the Mesa Pass. The snow was heavy and the trail only indifferently opened. To add to the difficulties, Scott had hitched a half-broken mule to the stage in place of the mare, which had gone lame. James, the remaining horse, was steady, however, and Douglas had only a moderate amount of trouble until the long, steep grade up to the pass began. Here, after an hour of reluctant going, the mule balked. James did what he could to pull her along. Douglas plied the black-snake, but to no avail.



"Hold up your hands!" A six-shooter in a mittened fist appeared over a rock heap at the roadside. Douglas blanched, then looked keenly at the mitten. "Come out of that, Jude!"

When she finally did move, it was to lie down with deliberate slowness. Douglas jumped out into the drifts and, by risking his life among her agitated legs, managed to get her up. Another hour passed in the intense cold before she finally was harnessed and meekly pulling more than her share of the load.

At the top of the pass Douglas drew up to breathe the team. Behind him, as he turned to look, lay Lost Chief Valley with blue clouds rolling from the tops of Dead Line and Falkner's Peaks. Douglas shivered and urged the team on. But the mule again balked, and as Doug gathered up the whip, a gruff voice cried,

"Hold up your hands!"

A six-shooter in a mittened fist appeared over a rock heap at the roadside.

Douglas blanched, then looked keenly at the mitten.

"Come out of that, Jude! Darn it, I thought you'd gone to Grandma Brown's."

Judith led Swift from behind the rock and mounted. Her eyes were bright with mischief.

"You turn right round and go home again, miss!" Doug cried, as Swift ranged beside the buckboard.

Judith giggled.

"You sure do need a hazer, Doug, while you're driving that mule! I left a note for mother."

"Go home! Don't speak to me. This is no trip for a girl!"

"You mean you want me to go home and help dad feed the two-year-olds?" demanded Judith.

Douglas scowled, and his mouth settled into sullen lines, but he said no more. Judith, having won her point, dropped behind the buckboard. The mule started suddenly and the journey continued in silence until it was time for the nooning. At Judith's suggestion, however, they decided to give this up, because of the cold, and push on to the half-way house. Judith was of very great assistance when again and again the mule sought to kick the harness to pieces. Still, Douglas was taciturn, and when they reached the house late in the afternoon, he gave his orders sulkily.

The little log cabin, with a rude horse-shelter beside it, stood in a clump of cedar close by the trail. A little spring was frozen by the door-step. The snow was fresh-trampled, for the up stage had left at three o'clock. Judith and Douglas were half numb with the cold. They hastily unharnessed, fed and watered the horses, then rushed into the cabin. The stove still held embers from the other mail-driver's fire. There was a bunk, covered with soiled and ragged quilts, a table, a few cooking-utensils and boxes for seats.

They lighted a candle and unearthed canned beans, coffee and canned brown bread from beneath the bunk. After he had eaten his supper, Doug grinned amicably at Judith. She asked at once:

"Ain't it the lonesomest place in the world, Doug? Did you bring in your forty-four?"

Douglas nodded toward his rifle, standing at the bunk-head.

"Hear the coyotes! I hope they don't come close, or that mule will kick the cabin down."

"I choose the bunk, Doug." She looked at him pleadingly.

"You can have it," returned Douglas. "I'm going to camp here by the stove." He went about arranging some quilts on the floor.

Judith perched on the edge of the bunk. In the uncertain light of the candle, she looked all eyes.

"Tell me, Doug: Why did you keep me from going with dad on Monday morning?"

Douglas straightened up, his back to the stove, scowled, sighed, then said:

"I feel like I want you to be like the girls in books and not like these women round here. And if you don't know what I mean, you are a fool!"

"Douglas Spencer, you know I'm just as good as any girl that ever lived in any book!"

"I know that, and I propose to keep you so." Doug lighted a cigarette.

"You're not my boss, Doug Spencer!"

"Yes, I am," returned Douglas serenely and he rolled himself in two of the quilts and pulled the corner of one over his head.

JUDITH put out her tongue at his muffled form and crept under the quilts that remained in the bunk. By and by the moonlight appeared through the window. The stove grew cold. The howling of the coyotes circled nearer and nearer. Suddenly a rifle-shot rang out, then another. The shots did not waken the sleeping boy and girl, but the mule brayed and began to kick with the rapidity of machine-gun fire. The boy and girl jumped up and ran out. The mule was just disappearing across the trail. Douglas jumped on Swift's bare back, catching the lariat from the saddle that lay on the manger.

"I'll come, too, on James!" said Judith. "I'll circle to the right!"

Douglas urged Swift through the drifts round a cedar grove and saw the mule stop to sniff at a horse which stood beside a dark heap in the snow. Judith appeared round the opposite side of the grove and the mule dashed away. They both hurried toward the quiet heap on the ground. A man lay in the drifts, his rifle beside him. It was Oscar Jefferson, with blood running out of his temple into the snow.

"Is he dead?" whispered Judith, crowding James up against Swift.

"I guess so. Must have been shots that scared the mule. Come on, Judith! We've got to get him into the cabin somehow."

Judith began to cry.

"I couldn't touch a dead man, Douglas!"

Douglas's own lips were very uncertain in the moonlight, but he answered firmly enough:

"We've got to do it. The coyotes will get him here."

"They'll say we shot him," sobbed Judith.

Doug gave a start.

"They sure Gawd will! What shall we do, Jude?"

"Go off and leave him, and say nothing about it."

"With our horses' hoof-prints all around him! You're crazy! Anyhow, we couldn't go off and leave a neighbor like this. 'Tain't Lost Chief manners."

"All right!" Jude wiped her eyes on her sleeve. "Let's put the lariat round his feet and let Jeff's horse pull him to the cabin. It won't hurt him in the soft snow."

"Nothing will hurt him any more—poor old Jeff!" said Douglas. He dismounted and moved toward the body. Then, with teeth chattering audibly, he tied the lariat round Jeff's feet and told Judith to get on the saddled horse.

"Guide him easy. I'll walk and lead the other horses, and see that nothing goes wrong."

Still whimpering, Judith obeyed, and the strange little procession moved toward the cabin. When they reached the shed, Doug loosened the lariat.

"Judith," he said, "the best thing we can do is to put him in the buckboard and take him home."

"I'm so afraid of a dead man, Doug!"

"So am I. But it's only poor old Oscar, after all, who's been our next-door neighbor all our lives. We can't leave him alone, like a dead horse. We'll take him home. That's what dad or any of the men would do. Come on, Jude!"

They established poor Oscar on the floor of the buckboard, among the mail-bags. They hitched up James and Oscar's big black and tied Swift to the tail-end. All this time the coyotes howled nearer and nearer.

"Cover him deep with the quilts, Doug," whispered Judith. "I'm going to make us a pot of hot coffee before we start."

"How about that mule?" whispered Douglas.

"Let it go plumb to hell," returned Judith. "Scott's the one should have been shot, for sending you out with such a brute."

"If it hadn't been for the mule, we'd never have found him," muttered Douglas.

IT WAS not much after eleven when the two, huddled together on the seat of the buckboard, started back for Lost Chief. The cold was so intense that they were obliged to take turns driving.

They talked very little except to guess as to the probable name of the murderer. Toward dawn, when the moon had set and Douglas was trusting the trail to the horses, he said,

"Do you remember at the schoolhouse Sunday, when Charleton said he didn't believe in any hereafter, old Jeff chimed in and said, 'Me, too'?"

"I remember," replied Judith.

"What do you suppose Jeff thinks about it now?"

"He ain't thinking. He's gone. There's no hereafter. Dad says so." Judith huddled still closer.

"Isn't it horrible?" shuddered Douglas. "Horrible!"

Judith began to cry again.

"If there was just a heaven," she sobbed, "I wouldn't mind living—or dying, either."

Everybody's Magazine, February, 1922

"Well, there isn't any." Douglas heaved a great sigh. "I wonder if they hang kids as young as us for murder."

"Let them try hanging me, just once! That's all I've got to say!" exclaimed Judith stoutly, in spite of her chattering teeth. "The worst I ever did to Oscar Jefferson was to play bucking bronco on that old milch cow, Jinny, of his. And she sure could buck! But I was only a little girl then, and I can prove it."

"Looks as if we might be in real trouble to me," muttered Douglas.

"It's growing daylight, and there's the pass at last!" suddenly cried Judith.

Douglas drew a deep breath and urged on the weary horses.

It was full nine o'clock when the team drew up at the post-office door. At Doug's halloo, Peter Knight appeared. Sister crowded out the door past him, pricked her ears forward and ran to sniff at the rear of the buckboard.

"What on earth brings you back at this hour?" demanded Peter.

"Trouble." Douglas moistened his frost-cracked lips. "Oscar Jefferson was shot last night. We got his body here."

"Who shot him?" asked Peter.

"We don't know."

"Where was it? Here, Sister; get back in the house!" Peter pushed the door wide.

Judith answered:

"Up beyond the cedars across from the half-way house. We found him while we were hunting for that devilish old mule."

Peter looked keenly at the two haggard young faces; then he said:

"You two come in and eat and get warm. I'll do some telephoning."

"I want to get home to my mother," half sobbed Judith.

"Sha'n't we take him on to his house?" asked Douglas.

Peter replied impatiently:

"You know he was batching it alone while young Jeff's in California. You come in, as I tell you."

Stiffly, the two stumbled out of the stage and into the warmth of Peter's quarters. He had just begun his own breakfast, and Douglas and Judith devoured it while Peter went to the telephone. In an incredibly short time, John Spencer and Frank Day, the sheriff, galloped up to the door. To them and to Peter the young people told their story. The sheriff asked a number of questions. After he had finished, Douglas queried anxiously,

"You ain't going to try to put it on us, Frank?"

Frank grinned.

"Well, I might, if the suspicions I have as to another party prove wrong."

"Don't torture 'em, Frank!" protested Peter. "They've been through a good deal for kids."

"Scott Parson was the only rider in the valley who didn't like Oscar," said John. "That war they've had for a year over the bull was bound to end in trouble. I warned Oscar."

"Oscar was more to blame than Scott," said the sheriff. "He was the meanest man for hanging out on a fool thing I ever knew. And I'm just as fond of Oscar as the rest of you. What was a bull to Oscar? He could buy a dozen of 'em. Scott hasn't a thing on earth except wages for riding, and that mangy little herd of slicks he's picked up."

"'Picked up' is right!" grunted John. "That bull, whoever it belonged to, is standard-bred."

"Scott was born with a nasty temper." Peter spoke thoughtfully. "He told Oscar in front of me he would get him. That was about two weeks ago."

"Did Oscar tell any one he was going anywhere?" asked the sheriff.

"Not me," said Peter. "Why not let the kids go home?"

"Sure!" agreed Frank. "You've done a good night's work, you two. Get some sleep now."

"You'll find Buster tied to my saddle, Doug," said John. "Judith, can Swift still move?"

"You bet she can!" replied Judith.

There was a laugh, and the two young people mounted and trotted onto the home trail.

OSCAR'S wife had long been dead. His son was on a cattle-buying trip and could not be reached. Oscar had been one of the richest men in the very well conditioned valley, so, instead of taking the body up to the lonely ranch-house, it was laid out in state in the post-office.

After it was found impossible to get in touch with young Jeff, and after the sheriff had made a three days' investigation, Grandma Brown, who always officiated at the births and deaths in Lost Chief, ordered the funeral to take place at once.

The grave forthwith was prepared. John Spencer, Peter Knight and Charleton Falkner were appointed by the old lady to do the work.

The cemetery was fenced in, but except for a few simple headstones and monuments, it was unadorned.

"Queer the women folks never fixed this place up a little," said Peter Knight, standing waist-deep in the grave with John. "Most places I've been, women keep the graves like they would a little garden."

Charleton Falkner smiled sardonically.

"Lost Chief women have enough to do without dolling up graves. What's the use?"

Peter Knight heaved a great frosted boulder out to the ground-level.

"Charleton," he said slowly, "doesn't the thought of lying in a forgotten grave give you the dumb horrors?"

"Sometimes," replied Charleton laconically.

John Spencer straightened his broad shoulders.

"If I let myself think about it," he muttered, "I have to go out and get drunk."

Peter nodded and said, as he stooped for another frozen clod,

"I'd give my right hand for my mother's faith in a living God."

"This is the price we pay for scientific progress," said Charleton. "Me, I'm willing to pay."

"I'm not," grunted Peter; "but I seem forced to." He swung his pick vehemently, and the rest of the work was finished in silence.

THAT afternoon, the funeral took place. There were services at the post-office, where any one who wished to do so spoke in praise of the dead man. There were many speeches, and it was late afternoon when the funeral cortège reached the cemetery. Douglas, his golden head catching the last of the sunset, watched Grandma Brown with passionate intentness. The old lady had charge of the ceremonies, and there was a sureness and sweetness about her that was vaguely comforting to the boy.

As the coffin was lowered into the grave, Grandma said,

"Does anybody feel like saying a few last words?"

There was silence, broken only by the murmurs of the forest.

"Can't any of you men that knew Oscar all his life say something comforting before you close the grave?" urged the old lady. "Then I'll try to do it. I was brought up religious myself." She lifted her serene old face to the evening sky. "O God, this man wandered far from You like all the rest of us here. But an old woman like me believes You're there and that You know Oscar hadn't a really bad hair in his head. Take his soul, Lord, and be as good to him as You can. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, even though he die, yet shall he have eternal life.' "

The tears were running down many cheeks when the old lady finished. Grandma giggled, then began to sing a hymn in which several of the women joined:

"God be with you till we meet again;
By His counsels guide, uphold you,
With His sheep securely fold you.
God be with you till we meet again."

And so the earthly career of Oscar Jefferson ended.

Douglas avoided the crowd and took a roundabout way homeward. Dusk was settling in the valley. Buster loped swiftly through the swimming landscape. Far to the east a single scarlet mountain-top pierced the twilight blue. Douglas eyed it wistfully.

"Seems as though I couldn't stand it!" he said aloud. "I'm going to stop at Grandma Brown's on my way home."

He took a short turn to the left and dismounted at the Browns' corral. Grandma was coming out of the cow-stable, lantern in hand. Douglas, spurs clanking, brave chaps flopping, ran to her like a child and caught her skirt in his gauntleted hand.

"Grandma! Grandma! Tell me something! Did you believe what you said at the grave?"

The old lady held the lantern up to his face.

"Come in the cow-stable out of the cold wind, Douglas."

Once within the dim shelter, she hung the lantern on a nail and sat down on a box, indicating another to the young rider.

"Yes; I believe it, boy. Didn't you?"

"No, Grandma; no! And none of the men do that count in this valley. Is it just old-woman stuff, like they say?"

"Maybe," sniffed Grandma.

"And if you believe it," Douglas rushed on, "why did you let us run the preacher out?"

"Oh, the preacher! Pooh! He's nothing but a blankety-blank sissy like the rest of the sky-pilots."

"But can't I believe like you do, Grandma? I'm just the unhappiest guy in the world!"

"You mean"—the old lady spoke deliberately—"that this is the first funeral you've seen that's set you to thinking and the fear of death is on you for the first time. I hope it will do you good, Doug. You're an awful rough little devil."

Douglas swallowed audibly.

"Grandma," he cried passionately, "how can I get to believe what you do?"

Grandma looked thoughtfully from her plump milch cow to the lantern and from the lantern to Douglas.

"Doug, I don't think you can, living among the folks you do. To have my kind of faith, you've got to have a mother that breeds it in you from the time you're a baby."

Douglas, his face looking absurdly young above his broad shoulders, said despairingly,

"I don't believe you want to help me!"

"Well"—Grandma was still deliberate—"I don't believe a wild young devil like you really wants help. You're just scared."

Douglas rose, drawing himself to his full height. He was deeply offended.

"I thought you might understand me!" he exclaimed, and he strode out to Buster and galloped home.

FOR a day or so he was haunted, particularly after he went to bed, by the thought of the grave scene and by the comments Grandma Brown had made. But Doug was only sixteen, after all, and shortly he was absorbed by other matters—the hunt for Scott Parson, the preparations for the dehorning, and his new and thrilling and secret feeling toward Judith. His father never made reference to the scene that had followed on Douglas's forbidding Judith to go with her stepfather to feed the two-year-olds. But Douglas noted with embarrassed satisfaction that John refrained from taking Judith on any more solitary trips with him.

The search for Scott delayed the round-up only for a short time. A day or so after the funeral it snowed, and the last chance of tracing Scott's tracks was removed. The cold was intense and the job really belonged to Sheriff Day, so the posse broke up after a few days and the dehorning was undertaken.

Early in the morning, half a dozen riders appeared at the ranch and joined Douglas and Judith in cutting out of the great herd in the swamp-field the steers in need of dehorning. During the morning, several of Judith's girl friends joined in the work. In proportion to their strength, Lost Chief girls were as clever as the men in handling horses and cattle. But Judith was easily the best of them. There was a fire and vim about her work that was lacking in the others. To-day, Maud and Sally and Gladys were ready to return to help Mrs. Spencer with the dinner long before Judith, and they finally left her careering over the field on Swift.

The cattle were herded into a large circular corral, out of which led a smaller enclosure. A cedar fire burned in the middle of the lesser corral. John Spencer, with two other men, stood near the fire, saws at hand, searing-iron heating, tar-pot simmering. The herd bellowed and milled about. The riders waited near the inner gate for Judith, who was to rope the first steer.

Judith sat Swift lightly, edging mischievously now against one rider, now another. Swift bit Buster, who reared, while Douglas swore laughingly. Magpies swooped from the blue spruce at the edge of the corral, black and white against pale blue. The cattle, all Herefords, red and white, lowed and tossed worried heads. The riders, sheepskin chaps flapping, bright neckerchiefs fluttering, shouted and cursed and fingered their lariats. Dogs—yellow dogs, black dogs, gray dogs, spotted dogs—continually encroached from without the fence and were ordered or lashed away.

Suddenly Swift shot from the group of horses. Judith spun her lariat, and a lusty steer, well back toward the south fence, turned and stumbled. Swift sat back on her haunches, turned as she rose, and leaped toward the dehorning corral. The bellowing steer was dragged backward, his left foot securely roped. He fell as they reached the gate and skidded helplessly on his side through the trampled yellow snow.

The men by the fire were ready. One of them perched on the steer's flank and freed the lariat, while another sat astride his neck and, amid a gush of blood, sawed off the horns close to the head. John seared the stubs with the hot iron dipped in tar. The poor brute bellowed with fright and pain. Judith recoiled her lariat and made way for Jimmy Day, who slid up with a protesting heifer.

"Jude," he shouted, "you're the cow-ropingest girl in the Rockies! Say, Jude; ain't you afraid that baa-baa you're riding will buck with you? Swift! What a hell of a name for that thing!"

"She can beat you roping 'em at that, Jimmy!" cried Douglas.

"Better ride light, Jimmy," warned John. "She thinks more of that mare than she does of me."

"All right, John!" laughed Jimmy. "Take this heifer, fellows! She thinks she's a moose."

"She'll think she's a kitten when we finish with her," chuckled John.

There was an uproar now in the two corrals that echoed from mountain to mountain. The trampled snow turned crimson. White Angora and sheepskin chaps were gaumed with thick gouts of blood.

The work had gone fast and furiously for some time when Douglas touched his father on the arm.

"Dad, look up on the shoulder of old Dead Line!" John straightened his back and shaded his eyes. A rider, leading a Hereford, was coming down the ridge.

"That's Scott's horse, Ginger," said Douglas. "Can you make out the rider?"

"Not yet." John continued to stare intently.

"It's Scott Parson!" cried Charleton Falkner.

"Shall we go git him?" exclaimed Jimmy Day.

"No. He's starved out and giving up. Let's hear what he has to say," said John.

The dehorning went on. Half a dozen more bleeding steers had been turned out before Scott, weary, gaunt, haggard beyond words, leading an emaciated young bull, drew rein beside the smaller corral. The roping came to a pause.

"Well, why the committee on welcome?" asked Scott hoarsely. His bloodshot eyes turned from one to another.

"Where'd you find the bull, Scott?" asked John.

"First located him on Fire Mesa."

"Whose bull is it now?" Charleton Falkner pushed Democrat toward the fence.

"Mine," Scott said shortly, his freckled face unmoved.

"Do you think it was worth the price?" demanded Spencer.

Scott looked searchingly at the crowd before him.

"What price did I pay?" he asked.

"Doug," commanded John, "you tell your story."

DOUGLAS, with considerable embarrassment and assisted by Judith, told of their trip in the mail-wagon. Scott listened with little apparent interest. He said nothing when the story was done.

"It's like this, Scott," said John: "It looks like you killed him. You've got a bad temper. So had Oscar. You fought for over a year about that fool bull, first one of you branding it, then the other. You're young, and you'd better give yourself up. You'll stand a better chance."

"Go ahead, Scott!" cried Judith. "I'll stand your friend like you did mine when I rode old Oscar's milch cow most to death."

"Shut up, Jude!" exclaimed Douglas.

"Go ahead, Scott." John half smiled. "You needn't worry. You have a friend."

"A friend won't do him much good if he's guilty," grunted Charleton Falkner.

"Anybody's better off for at least one friend," repeated Judith stoutly. "Darn it! All of you picking on poor old Scott!"

Scott's haggard eyes focused on Judith. "I'll hold you to that, Jude! You're the only white man in the valley. I came in to give myself up, Jude. The cold got me. I shot him after he'd rebranded the bull before my eyes and after he'd given me this." He ripped open his mackinaw and shirt and tore a rag from his shoulder, disclosing a livid wound. "I ain't the only one that's quick on the trigger."

There was a quick murmur among the riders. John and Charleton, the oldest men in the group, looked at each other.

"Charleton, you and Jimmy Day ride to Scott's house with him," said John. "I'll go to the house and telephone to the sheriff."

"Can your horse carry you so far, Scott?" asked Judith. Scott nodded, with something curiously like tears in his hard hazel eyes.

"You take the bull, Jude," he said. "I'd like for you to have him. He's standard-bred."

Judith's eyes shone like stars.

"If dad'll only let me! Do you think he will, Doug?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders. The bull was tied to the fence, and Scott rode slowly away with his escort. When John returned from telephoning, he gave a grudging consent to Judith's taking the bull, and the dehorning went on. Not until the last bellowing steer had found solace at the haystacks did the riders start homeward. Douglas followed Judith as she led the scarecrow bull.

"He's a good mate for Swift," he said.

"You're just jealous!" retorted Judith.

"Of what?" demanded Douglas.

"Of me starting a herd before you do."

"Ha! Ha!" ejaculated Doug, without a smile, and nothing more was said until they reached the house.

At supper that night, John asked Judith why she had shown so much friendship for Scott Parson.

"I was sorry for him," she replied.

"But he killed our old neighbor!" exclaimed John.

"Yes; and Oscar had a notch on his gun, dad, and you have one on yours."

"We put those notches there in the early days," returned John, "when every cow-man carried the law on his hip. It's different now. You're altogether too highty-tighty, Jude, for a girl. You keep away from Scott Parson or I'll make you regret it."

Judith made no reply.

SCOTT'S trial took place in April. It was a matter of deep interest, of course, to Lost Chief, and every one who could get to Wyoming City by horse, wagon or automobile attended the court session. Judith and Douglas were chief witnesses and were royally entertained by young Jeff, who had returned to Lost Chief a week or so after his father's funeral.

Scott was acquitted on the plea of self-defense, but he did not return at once to Lost Chief. The attitude of young Jeff did not make an early return seem diplomatic.

Douglas, when he had come home from the trial, had a curious feeling that the winter just passed had ended his boyhood. He did not know why. He was not old enough to realize that when the fires of desire and the fear of death begin to sear a boy's mind, adolescence is passing and manhood has all but arrived.

Judith, who had accomplished her fifteenth birthday in March, a day or so before Doug arrived at the dignity of seventeen, had changed, too. She had been less profoundly affected by the murder than Douglas; not that she was less sensitive or intelligent than he, but she was far less introspective than her foster-brother. And Judith had two unfailing foods for all hungers of the mind. One was her love of reading, the other her love of riding, both absorbing to the elimination of self-investigation.

Douglas read a great deal himself. Books and magazines furnished the only mental stimulants for the valley, and it was a surprisingly well-read community. But Douglas, caring for Judith as he did, found it impossible to become fully absorbed in his old pastimes. He was restless, moody, and lonely as only youth can be.

He and Judith had both been graduated from the log school early in June. There was the usual graduation dance at the post-office, at which, as usual, Peter Knight officiated.

The hall was dimly lighted by a single kerosene-lamp. Tobacco smoke mingled with the pungent smell of whisky, which seemed to be the chief ingredient of a concoction in a large pail under the lamp. In a corner opposite the pail was a phonograph, over which Peter presided.

Everybody danced. Even the dogs were not prohibited the floor. Only when Sister started a fight with Prince did any one protest, and the dogs were driven back, temporarilly, under the benches.

Inez Rodman, very fair and slender, easily five feet nine, was scorned by the older women but was brazenly popular with their husbands and the younger set of boys and girls. Judith danced all the time, but only occasionally with Douglas, who sulked as a consequence. John Spencer divided his time between Judith and Inez.

After each dance, old and young flocked to the reeking bucket.

It was nearing midnight when Douglas achieved his first dance with Inez. She was the best dancer in the room, and Douglas told her so.

"I'll bet you haven't told that to the other girls," she said, with a flash of her white teeth.

"I have! I said it to Jude when she turned me down for dad."

"Smart! Helps both you and me with Jude, of course!"

"Much you care about that!" retorted Douglas.

"I like to be liked, of course," said Inez.

"You do?" Douglas's voice was so honestly incredulous that Inez exclaimed resentfully,

"Am I so much worse than a lot of the kids at school?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Judith's straight. I've kept her so."

Inez laughed.

"Judith's straight because she's that kind of a girl. Why don't you watch your dad instead of Jude?" Douglas's lips tightened and Inez studied his face in silence for a moment; then she went on: "Pretty fond of Jude, aren't you, Doug? Your father is a devil with women—that big, bossy, good-looking kind always is. I tell Jude so every time I see her."

"How often do you see her?" demanded Douglas quickly.

"I guess she has a right to come to my house as often as she wants to."

"No, she hasn't"—bruskly.

Inez sniffed, then smiled. She had a frank and lovely smile. Douglas's face softened, and they finished the waltz in silence.

Not all the music was of the cheaply popular variety. Between dances Peter slipped on opera-records. There was one on from "Martha" when a man called from the open door,

"Good-evening, folks!"

"Why, it's Scott Parson!" cried Grandma Brown.

YOUNG JEFF, his red face even redder than his visits to the pail would warrant, put his hand to his hip. Judith darted before him and ran the length of the room.

"Hello, Scott! Welcome home! The next dance is yours."

"No, it's not!" shouted John Spencer. "You let Judith alone, you young outlaw, you!"

"Get out of my way, Jude!" shouted young Jeff. "I told Scott not to come back to Lost Chief."

He strode down the room, his hand still on his gun. Scott's hand was equally quick. Peter Knight turned off the machine.

"Hold on, Jeff!" he cried. "You gave Scott over to the law, and the law acquitted him. If you'd wanted to take things in your own hands, you should have done so before the trial. If you kill Scott, you're no better than he is."

"That's right!" cried Grandma Brown. "And your record ain't so clean, young Jeff, that you can afford to start anything!"

Judith tossed her head.

"I don't see why young Jeff should be allowed to spoil a perfectly good party."

"If you can't put him out, Jude, I can!" cried Inez.

Everybody laughed. Jude seized one of young Jeff's big hands, Inez the other. There was an uproarious scuffle, which ended in the three, laughing immoderately, executing a hybrid folk-dance to the one-step which Peter had put on the phonograph. And Scott danced unmolested during the remainder of the night.

Charleton Falkner had drunk a good deal, but was as yet little the worse for it. He and Douglas met at the pail shortly after midnight. Charleton gave the young man an amused glance.

"You look sort of sad, Doug. Come outside and talk a little."

Douglas gave a quick glance round the hall, at Judith swooping in great circles with Scott Parson, at Inez dancing with his father. "All right!" he said and followed Charleton out into the moonlight. They perched on the buck fence and smoked for a time in silence.

"That's a good horse of young Jeff's, eh?" said Charleton finally.

"Not as good as the dapple-gray he gave me will be when I get time to break him," replied Douglas. "I don't know. I ain't as interested in things as I was."

"What's the matter?" asked Charleton sympathetically.

"I guess Oscar's killing upset me," said Douglas vaguely.

"I don't suppose you ever heard of *Weltschmerz*," mused Charleton. "It's a kind of mental stomach-ache most young fellows get about the time they begin to fall in love." Douglas grunted. "Though you were pretty young to run onto Oscar that way," Charleton went on thoughtfully.

"It isn't that, though I was scared stiff, of course. But it was seeing Oscar laid in the ground to rot and hearing you and Peter and dad say that was all there was to it."

Charleton nodded.

"I know. But you'll reach my state of philosophy when you're a little older. Wine and women and a good horse—they help."

Douglas drew a shuddering breath.

"Is that all you've found out? All?"

"Of course there's ambition," said Charleton. "I was ambitious myself once. You know my father was a college man and he wanted me to go back East to school. I almost went."

"Why didn't you go?" asked Douglas, immensely flattered at the mark of confidence being shown him. Charleton Falkner was notoriously reticent about himself.

"Oh, it's this easy life of the open. Why should I have gone into politics, as my father wanted me to, when I could be happier with an easy living right here. And it would all end up there in the cemetery, anyhow. And what had ambition to offer me in comparison to the sport of running wild horses on Fire Mesa or riding herd in the reserve or hunting deer on Falkner's Peak? Horses, dogs, guns, women, whisky, the open country of the Rockies! Enough for any man."

"Maybe," muttered Douglas.

"What are you going to do now you're through school?" asked Charleton abruptly.

"Ride for dad. He's promised me a herd of my own when I'm twenty-one."

"Listen!" said Charleton. "How'd you like to do a little business with me once in a while when John can spare you? You know—cattle, horses and such."

Douglas grinned delightedly.

"Do you really mean it? Why, you know, Charleton, as well as I do, there isn't a young rider in Lost Chief who wouldn't give anything to go out on trips with you."

"Fine! I'll be tipping you the wink one of these days. In the mean time, keep your mouth shut to every one but your father. Come in and we'll have a drink on the new partnership."

Douglas had as yet acquired no great taste for such fiery potations as the pail contained. But Charleton now applied himself so strenuously to the business of getting drunk that shortly he was leaning on the phonograph, reciting with powerful lungs,

> " 'Tis but a tent where takes his one day's rest
> A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest;
> The Sultan rises and the dark Ferrash
> Strikes, and prepares it for another guest."

No one heeded him particularly. He smiled amiably at Peter, leaned further on the machine.

"Somebody will have to ease me to my horse," he murmured, and drowsed forward over the phonograph. Douglas and Peter, laughing, eased him to his horse and Charleton, his arms round Democrat's neck, jogged slowly off on the home trail.

JUNE dawn was peering over the Indian Range when the party broke up. Scott disappeared with Judith. When John discovered this, be bolted after the two.

"You'd better go see that nothing happens, Doug," said Mary Spencer. "John's drunk too much."

"I'm going home," declared Douglas. "I got some pride, and Judith's treated me like a dog to-night. She's too fond of starting something she don't know the finish of."

Mary and he were riding alone in the dawn.

"You promised me you'd look out for her. Don't you care for her any more, Douglas?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Have you ever told her so?"

"She's too young."

"No, she isn't, Douglas. She's very mature."

Douglas said nothing, and after a moment his stepmother said hesitatingly,

"Doug, I hate to see you dancing so much with Inez."

"What harm was there in it?"

"I don't know that I can tell you, Doug. When I was a girl, going to the log schoolhouse, we girls never thought of touching whisky. Our mothers would have killed us if we had."

"The world do move," grunted Douglas.

"I don't believe it's the world. Not from the books I read. I think it's just Lost Chief. The old folks in my day had real influence in the valley. There were many like Grandma Brown. But now! Why, your father will never be the good influence his father was, and I'll never be like Grandma. I don't know why."

"You can't even train your daughter," said Douglas, with entire frankness.

"Can the other mothers?" asked Mary resentfully. "What can I do when the other mothers are so easy?"

"It ain't exactly easy," Douglas spoke thoughtfully. "The Lord knows all the kids in Lost Chief work hard enough and get walloped enough."

Mary sighed deeply. Douglas watched her face, so like Judith's, but bearing tragic lines it would have broken his heart to see round Judith's young lips. With unwonted gentleness he leaned over to put his hand on Mary's while he smiled at her half sadly.

"Poor mother! We are an ornery lot. But you are as good as gold, and Jude and I both know it."

Quick tears stung Mary's gray eyes. She lifted his hand to her cheek for a moment; then, as he drew it away, she tried to return his smile. But nothing more was said until they reached home.

Just as they entered the living-room, Judith rushed in.

"I hate dad! I hate him! Scott and I were jogging home by way of the west trail as peaceful as anything when dad has to come along and start a row going."

"Anybody hurt?" asked Douglas.

"No; but no thanks to dad! Scott turned round and left because I asked him to. There's dad now."

John clanked in, but before he could speak, Judith rose and shook her forefinger in his face.

"Now, dad," she said steadily, "there's going to be no rowing and no cursing. I'm sick of it. Right here and now I warn you to stop interfering with me or I'll leave."

John raised his ready fist.

"None of that!" Doug's voice was quiet. "Finish what you have to say, Jude."

John scowled, breathing heavily, his eyes never leaving Judith.

"I'm sick of it," she repeated. "There must be places in the world where there's something besides family rows. I'd like to hear something fine come out of your lips just once, dad."

"Are you through?" demanded John.

"Yes, I am."

"Then I've got one thing to say. You let Scott Parson alone." John flung himself down on the bed, and before Mary had pulled off his spurred riding-boots, he was asleep.

DOUGLAS went out to the corral, where soon after Judith appeared with her milking-pail. He leaned on the fence and watched her.

"Jude," he said, "you are on the wrong foot. You ought to let whisky and Inez Rodman alone."

"Why don't you let 'em alone?" demanded Judith.

"It's different with a man."

"Oh, don't give me that old stuff!" cried the girl. "We women do men's work in this valley. We'll have the men's kind of fun if we want it."

"That's not the point," returned Douglas. "Women have to pay a price the men don't, and that's all there is to it."

"It's not fair! It's not fair! I hate the world! I hate it! Looks like you'd either got to be like mother or Inez Rodman."

"Your mother's all right; only, dad's broke her just like he broke old Molly horse."

"Did I ever say my mother wasn't all right? Only, I'll tell you one thing, Doug Spencer: Inez Rodman's given me more sensible warnings about men than my mother ever did."

Douglas wore a worried expression.

"Seems like there's something wrong about that. Mother knows all about those things." He cleared his throat. "Say, Jude; you've got to be mighty careful about dad. He's——"

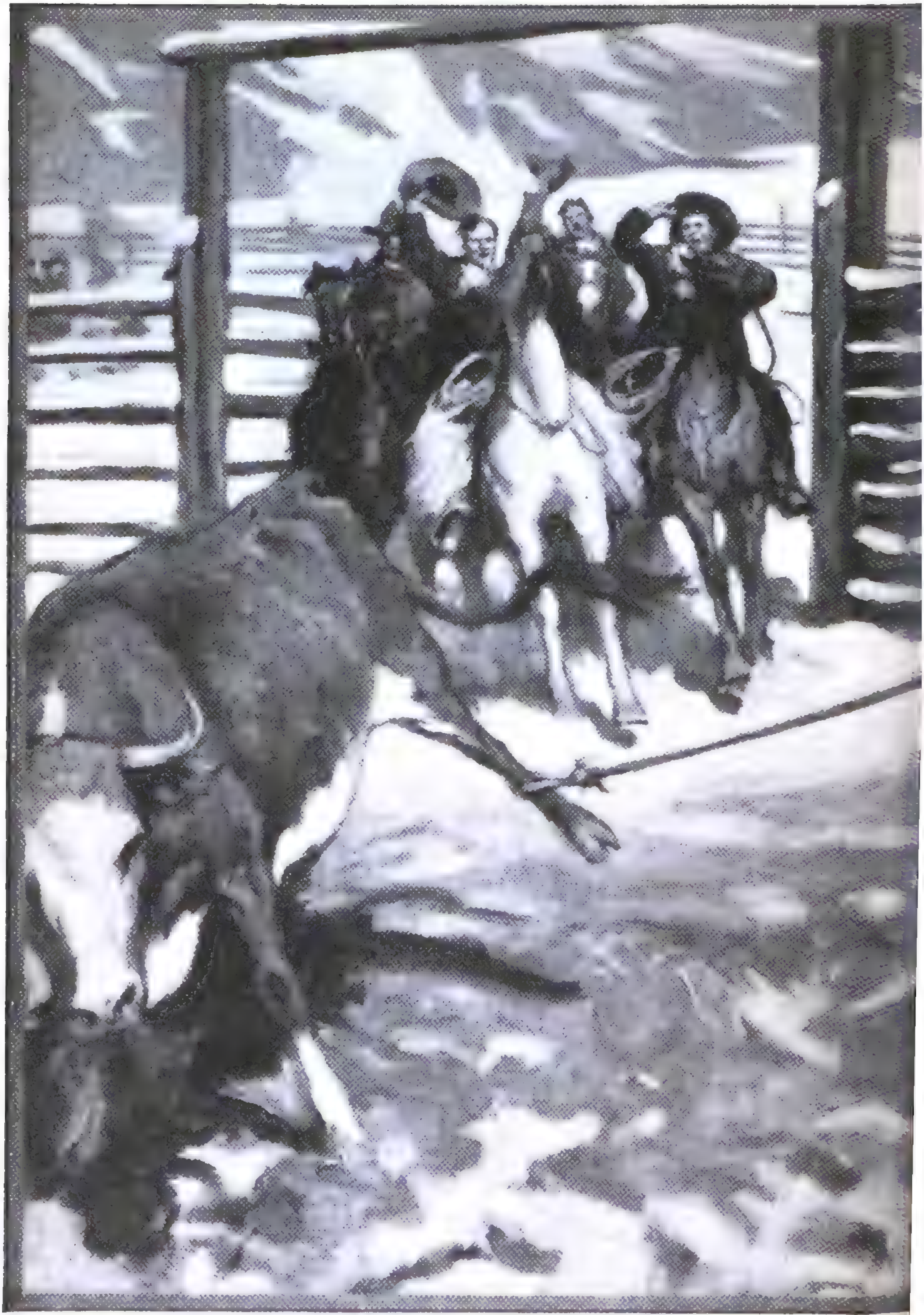
"Oh, forget it, Douglas! Am I a baby? Sometimes I think I'd just as soon shoot him as look at him, for all he's so fascinating."

Douglas's eyes expressed so many emotions that suddenly the half-angry look on Judith's face gave way to a smile.

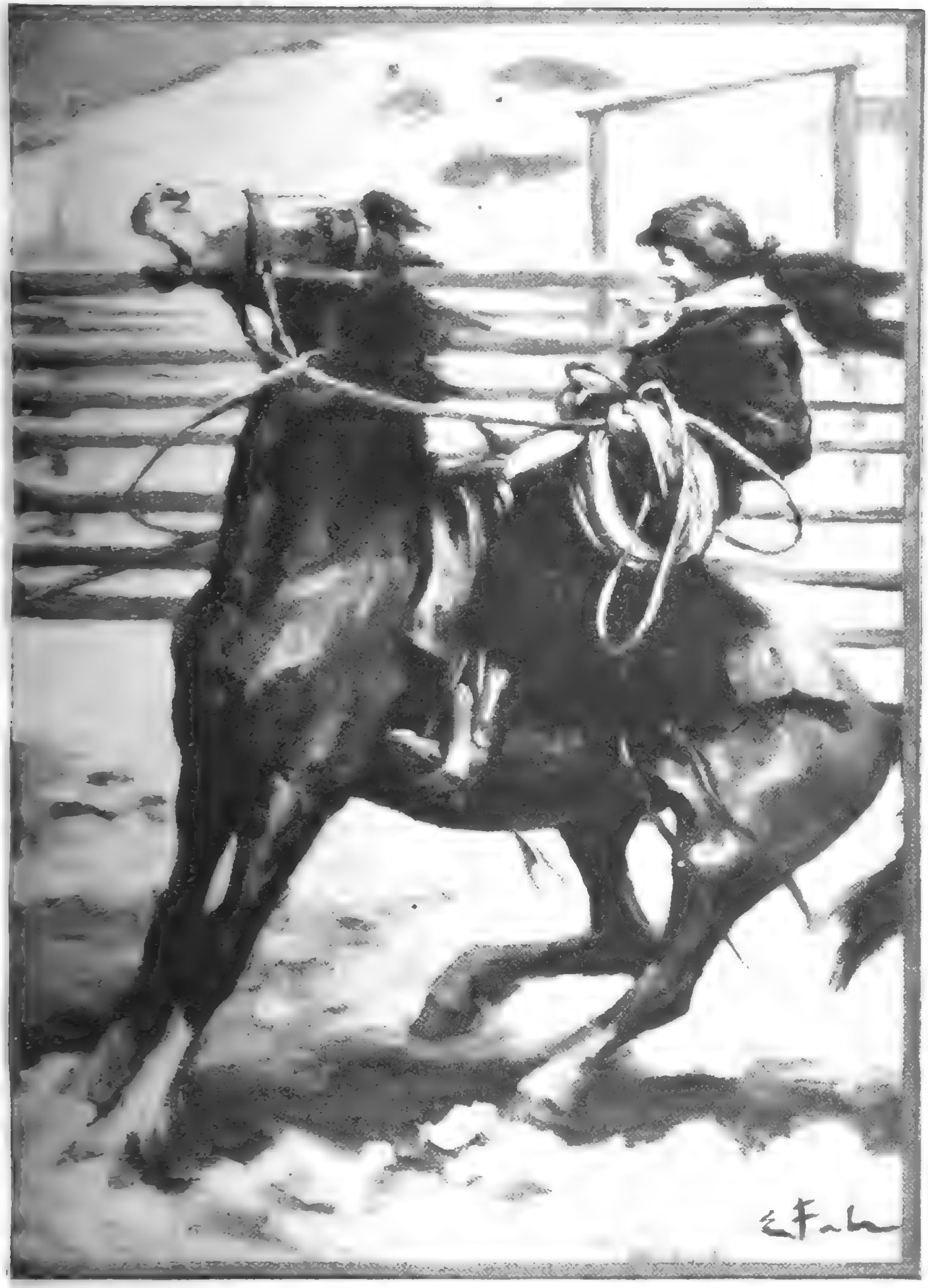
"Oh, Doug! Doug! You old owl! What's the matter with you? After all, it's good to be alive. I wish I had a horse as good as Buster and I wouldn't ask for much more in life."

"I'll give you Buster," said Douglas suddenly.

Judith's jaw dropped.



Judith spun her lariat, and a lusty steer turned and stumbled. Swift sat back on
steer was dragged backwa



haunches, turned as she rose, and leaped toward the dehorning corral. The bellowing his left foot securely roped.

"Give me Buster?"

"I mean it."

"But—but— Why, Douglas, what's happened to you?"

"Judith"—Douglas tossed back his yellow hair and put a brown hand over Judith's—"Judith, I love you. Won't you be engaged to me?"

"Love *me!*" Judith's beautiful gray eyes opened to their widest. "Why, it doesn't seem more than yesterday that you were calling me a pug-nosed maverick and, besides, I'm only fifteen and you're only seventeen."

"Is it Scott?" asked Douglas.

"It isn't anybody. Why, Douglas, you must be crazy!"

"Do I look crazy?"

Judith looked deep into Douglas's blue eyes.

"No"—slowly—"you don't."

"You can have Buster, and Prince, too," said Douglas.

"No sir, Doug. Why, they're all you've got in the world!"

"I have that dapple-gray young Jeff gave me after the trial. He's old enough to break now."

There were tears in Judith's eyes.

"Douglas Spencer, you are a gentleman! If I do have a horse like Buster, I can be lots more help handling the cattle."

"He's yours from this minute," repeated Douglas. "And so am I yours. But I'm not going to nag you about it. I'm just going to try to look out for you."

There was something so sober, so gentle and so determined about Douglas that, for once in her life, Judith was at a loss for a reply. She started slowly for the cow-shed. Then she turned back.

"But I'm not going to take Prince, Douglas. That's too much."

"Well," said Douglas, "maybe I will keep Prince for a while. It'll be kind of lonesome."

AND so Douglas made his first proposal to Judith. He was both elated and dejected by the conversation. Elated to feel that at last Judith knew his feeling toward her. Dejected because he felt that, as far as understanding what that feeling was, Judith was still a child. And the more he thought about her intercourse with Inez the more perturbed he became. After a day or so of pondering on the matter, he resolved to ask Inez to let Judith alone.

The Rodman house was built against the sheer yellow-stone facing at the base of Lost Chief Range, known incorrectly as the Yellow Cañon. The house of half a dozen rooms was the most picturesque cabin in the valley, for Grandfather Rodman had built the roof with an overhang, giving the house the hospitable shadows of a little Swiss chálet. There were several hundred acres belonging to the ranch. Free range had grown small before Inez's father died and he had got his acres well into grass and alfalfa. But when he and Inez's mother were wiped out by smallpox, leaving the ranch to Inez and degenerate old Uncle Rodman, the fields rapidly returned to the wild. Inez, fifteen at the time of her parents' deaths, was unwilling to lead the life of a ranch-woman, and for ten years the ranch had been going to pieces.

When Douglas rode up to the outer corral in the dusk of the June evening on old Mike, he looked inquiringly at two other horses tied to the dilapidated corral fence. They were Beauty, his father's horse, and Yankee, Peter Knight's roan mare.

As Doug sat hesitating, John and Peter came out of the kitchen, laughing. They swung, spurs clanking, up to the fence.

"What the devil are you doing here, Doug?" asked Peter.

"Hasn't he got a right to call on the harlot of the cañon?" demanded John, with a chuckle. "Hustle up, Peter! The crowd'll be there for the game before you are."

"They can't get in till I unlock," replied Peter. "Here, John; take the key and ride on. I want to talk to Doug."

John caught the key and trotted off. Sister snarled at Prince, who wagged his tail apologetically.

"She's a shrew, all right," grinned Douglas.

"She sure can run coyotes, though," said Peter.

"She and Grandma Brown run this valley," added Douglas.

Peter laughed.

"I'm strong for the ladies! Did you ever watch the moon rise, Doug, from the bench above the cabin there?"

"No," answered Douglas.

"Come on up. It's not a long ride. I've

been wanting to make you a proposition for some time."

Douglas followed the postmaster silently. The horses were panting and sweating by the time they reached the bench. All the valley lay in darkness. The two dismounted and threw themselves down on the ledge. Douglas lighted a cigarette while Peter filled his pipe.

"What are you planning to do with yourself now you're through school, Douglas?"

"Ride for dad."

"How'd you like to go East to school?"

"Nothing doing! I've got more education now than I'll ever need as a rancher."

"Well, I guess that's not particularly so," said Peter. "I was thinking—you know I'm alone in the world—that I might help you out if you had any leaning toward college or a profession."

"Ranching is good enough for me, thank you all the same, Peter."

For some moments Peter did not speak again. Then,

"Does your father ever talk to you about your own mother, Doug?" he asked.

"No; I quit asking him questions years ago. I know a lot about Grandpa Douglas, of course, but, Peter, all I know about my mother is that her name was Esther, that the smallpox wiped her folks out, and that they owned the north half of our ranch. There's an old photograph of her in dad's bureau drawer. She was awful pretty."

"She was more than that, Doug. I knew her well. You see, I'm the only man in the valley that's a stranger, as you might say. I've only lived here twenty years. So I could appreciate your mother more than the natives. I came here a roundabout way from Boston. So did your mother's folks about forty-five years ago. She looked as Yankee as her blood, thin and delicate, with a refined face.

"She was not fitted for the kind of ranch-work women have to do here. Women with blood and brains, like most of the Lost Chief women, are best used to keep alive the decencies and gentler things of life. Men lose those things in a cattle-country unless the women keep 'em alive."

Douglas pondered this for a long time, his eyes on the glory of the Indian peaks. Then he said,

"You knew my mother well?"

"Yes. I'd have married her, Doug, if she hadn't already married your father. She—she was so devilishly overworked and unhappy. But she never complained. Your father was crazy about her, but he treats a woman like he does a horse. He doesn't know any different."

"Oh, don't tell me any more!" said Douglas brokenly. "The poor little thing! Seems as if I couldn't stand it. Peter, I'm glad she died!"

THE older man was silent for a time, then went on:

"Your mother came of good people. Her grandfather was a friend of Emerson's. Tucked away somewhere she had some letters the two men exchanged. Your grandfather dreamed dreams about establishing a new New England out here. Those letters should have been saved for you.

"So, taking one thing with another," Peter Knight explained, "I thought I might see if you had anything in your head except horse-wrangling."

"I don't see why ranching isn't a good enough profession for any one," protested the boy.

"It might be. In lots of places it is. But it's not in Lost Chief."

"I don't see why," repeated Douglas.

"I never heard your mother swear or use a foul word," said Peter. "I've been on ranches in other places where the women would have been shocked at the idea. How about Judith?"

"You know she only curses like the other women do around here."

"Do you like it?" asked the postmaster.

"I never thought anything about it."

"There you are!" groaned Peter. "If I could only make you see! Doug, a woman lets down the first bar when she begins to swear and drink while she's wrangling cattle. She begins where Judith is beginning. She's mighty apt to end where Inez is ending. You just think about ranching in Lost Chief from your mother's point of view."

There was another silence. Then Douglas asked seriously,

"Peter, what am I going to do to keep Judith from going to Inez for advice?"

"Might not be such bad advice. Inez has no illusions about what she's doing or what she's paying."

"You don't mean to say Judith ought to go there?"

"No, I don't! But if a kid like you goes there himself, how can you preach to Judith? And she only goes there for the dancing and fun."

"But I'm a man."

"I don't care what you are. You can't preach good sermons with a foul tongue. You ought to have the nerve to look at yourself as you are before you try to bring up Judith. Lost Chief is still fairly honest. Even your father calls Inez Rodman by her right title. There's hope in that."

"But what shall I do about Judith, Peter?"

"Might make a man of yourself, Doug."

"What's the matter with me?" demanded Doug indignantly.

"Douglas, you haven't a clean-cut idea to your name. And a kid of seventeen as self-satisfied as you are isn't worth baiting a coyote-trap with."

"There's not a guy in the valley works harder than I do," protested Doug.

"Right! Nor uses his brain less."

"I suppose you mean I ought to go to college and let Judith go to the devil."

"Judith's pretty good stuff herself," protested Peter.

"Peter, you know as well as I do that—you know my father——"

"Yes; I know your father as well as you do Douglas, old man, but a half-baked kid like you can't influence Judith."

Douglas started to his feet.

"By God, I will! You'll see!"

"There's only one way. Show yourself fit to influence her. Don't get a grouch at me, Doug. I've come a long, hard, lonely road. And all because I thought everybody was wrong but myself. I don't want your mother's son to make the same mistake if I can help it."

"I'm the unhappiest guy in the world!" cried Douglas passionately.

He mounted Mike and followed joyfully by Prince, turned down the trail. Peter did not stir. For a long time he sat with his arm around Sister. The moon was high over the valley before he said aloud:

"Oh, Esther! Esther! The years are long!" Then he, too, mounted and rode away.

As MIKE trotted through Rodman's dooryard, Inez crossed toward the corral.

"Hello, Doug! Where've you been? What's the matter with Buster?"

Douglas drew up.

"I gave him to Judith."

"Why, you blank little fool! It must have hurt you deep."

"I guess Judith's worth it. Say, Inez; is there anything I can do for you to get you to keep Judith away from here."

"I can't drive her away, Doug."

"Aw, Inez, what's the use of saying that? Make out you're sore at her."

"I could, but that won't do much for her. Judith ought to have something to look forward to besides breeding calves and wrangling fire-wood for some lazy dog of a rancher before she or any other Lost Chief girl will think keeping away from here is worth while."

There was a depth of bitterness in the woman's voice which Douglas felt rather than understood. He sat in awkward silence. Inez put her hand on his knee and looked up at him. Her face was tragically beautiful in the moonlight.

"Douglas, do you ever stop to think how beautiful Lost Chief country is?"

"Not often," admitted Doug.

Inez went on:

"Peter Knight's been all over the United States, and he says there's no place passes it in beauty. Sometimes when I see the valley like it does to-night, I cry. Doug, you are more promising than these other kids. When you ride round on the range, try to keep your mind a little bit off cattle and horses and women and keep it on that line of the Forest Reserve the way it looks to-night. Or on the way this yellow wall looks in the snow, and the sunrise on it. And then, when you get that habit, tell Judith about it and get her to thinking the same way. Beauty and rot never went together, Douglas. And loose morals is rot, I don't care what Charleton Falkner quotes about the poets."

"Inez," asked Douglas huskily, "why don't you burn that old cabin up?"

"Because I don't want to," returned Inez shortly, and she turned on her heel and left him.

Douglas rode thoughtfully along the home trail. His chief feeling was one of great loss, as if that evening he had buried his mother and that his need of her never had been so dire. But he carried many new ideas to bed with him that night and to the hay-fields the next day and the next.

Both Douglas and Judith were too hard-worked during the next few weeks to find time for conversation or for mischief. From dawn to dark they worked in the hay-fields and tumbled to bed at night almost too weary to eat the supper Mary fed them. The few spare moments either youngster had was devoted by Judith to training her young bull and by Douglas to breaking the dapple-gray. Douglas did not know whether or not Judith was seeing Scott Parson. The young rider did not come to the ranch, at least. Judith saw Inez, but only at the post-office. Lost Chief had no time to waste on visiting when hay was to be made. Douglas thought impatiently many times of Peter Knight's criticisms of him. It is extremely difficult for a boy of seventeen to be honest with himself. It is probable that had Douglas not been so consumed with the desire to make of Judith the perfect creature he wanted her to be, he would have dismissed the whole conversation as merely another example of the futile idiocy of adults.

But Douglas was a person of singular fidelity and depth of affection. He cared for few people, but those received all the love that was in him.

And so Douglas, sweating in the hay-fields, thought resentfully of Peter's suggestion that he first clean his own stables before criticising Judith's. He was deeply imbued with the idea that men and women should use two entirely different sets of morals. It seemed to him as unmanly, an impossible thing, for him to adopt the code he was trying to force on Judith. It was not for many days that he coupled with his sense of resentment an attempt to see Judith through his dead mother's eyes. And this attempt ended with a sense of helpless confusion. He did wish, though, that he might have known what had been the dream his grandfather had had for Lost Chief. He asked his father about the Emerson letters. John did not know of their existence. Inez's sad eyes that had shed tears over the beauty of the hills, Charleton's sardonic mirth twisting wryly over his philosophy of content founded on women, horses and whisky—these the boy turned over and over in his eager, immature mind, wishing that his father were the kind of man one could talk to of intangible things, and wondering what Judith would say if he told her of his various wonderments.

Douglas was acutely unhappy—unhappy as only youth, with its lack of tried philosophy, can be. And he was, as a result, taciturn, sulky and a source of acute discomfort to the whole family.

ONE hot afternoon in August, Douglas had just unhitched the panting team from the bull-rake and was driving them toward the ranch-house when Charleton Falkner trotted up on Democrat.

"Out of the woods, Charleton."

"I just saw your father, and he said he could spare you. I wish you'd come down to my place to-morrow night. I want to tell you of a trip I'm planning. Your father wouldn't loan you Beauty, I suppose, for a day or two?" Douglas shook his head. "Well," Charleton went on, "I guess Buster can stand up under it."

"Buster belongs to Judith now. I've been trying to break that dapple-gray horse young Jeff gave me last spring after the trial. He's a good horse. Darned if I don't believe I can ride him now. Where are we going, Charleton?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow night. All right! I know that horse. Ride the young Moose if you can stick on him. You'll need all his wind and limb on this trip." And Charleton trotted away.

It was full starlight the next night when Douglas freed his feet from the stirrups before Charleton's door and jumped like lightning from the saddle. His horse jumped with him, landing in the kitchen as Douglas brought up against the door-jamb. There was a roar of laughter from within, and as the horse lunged backward out of the door, Charleton appeared.

"So you and the Moose are here! Better hobble him, Doug."

Douglas laughed and tied the rearing horse to a hay-rack. Then he followed Charleton into the kitchen. Scott Parson was sitting by the table, hat on the back of his head, spurred boots on the cold stove-hearth. Mrs. Falkner was just finishing the supper-dishes. She greeted Douglas with a tired smile.

Douglas, with a resentful glance at Scott, shifted his gun-belt, shoved his own hat to the back of his head and sat down. Mrs. Charleton pitched the dish-water out the back door and went into the next room.

"Well, fellows," said Charleton cheerfully, as he tipped back in his chair and established his spurs beside Scott's, "there's a neat little job on the horizon. You both know the big cañon beyond Lost Chief Peak. Well, a Mormon named Elijah Nelson has settled there. I'm not certain of all he intends to do, but I know this much: He's to homestead that cañon up there and hog the water-rights on the creek. He's to be followed by nine other Mormon families. Some of 'em are going to raise cattle in the cañon. Some of 'em are going into the sheep business in the plains country beyond the cañon where there's no snow in winter and where we Lost Chief folks have been in the habit of wintering our herds when the snow's too deep up here. Some of us older Lost Chief men realize that these folks are the beginning of a march of Mormons up from Utah. And we're going to harry them till they are sick of living. Mormons and sheep must keep out of this country."

Douglas's breath came quickly. Scott's hard young eyes did not flicker.

"We're going to ride over the range tomorrow night and the next morning gather up what we can of Nelson's herd that's grazing on Lost Chief. We'll bring 'em to a certain place I know of. I'll divide, half to me, the other half to you two. Are you game?"

"I sure am!" said Scott. "How many do you think we can gather in?"

"Not so many on one trip. Perhaps fifteen, if we have good luck. A big herd leaves a big trail."

"There's an old corral up near the government elevation monument," said Douglas. "It's all overgrown with bushes and young aspens, so's I don't think one person out of twenty know's it's there. Maybe we could corral 'em there."

Charleton gave Douglas a quick glance.

"How'd you come to know about it?"

"I happened on it last summer tracking a bear."

"That's what I planned to use," nodded Charleton. "We'll make a real cow-man out of you yet. So you're ready to go?"

Douglas's eyes were blazing.

"Go? You couldn't pay me enough to keep me away. Nothing ever happens in this old valley."

"All right. Be here by nine o'clock tomorrow night, wearing chaps. It'll be rough riding, and that Moose of yours will be quite considerably broke by the time we get back, Doug. I'll supply the grub."

"Fine!" said Scott, rising. "If that's all, I'll be running along. Stage was late tonight and the crowd'll be there getting mail. I'll be with you on time, Charleton."

"Me, too!" exclaimed Douglas, following Scott slowly out of the door.

Real drama, live, intense, is played by the Lost Chief folks in the next instalment of "Godless Valley," which appears in March EVERYBODY'S—out February 15th.

Wind

By Hildegarde Hawthorne

THE wind is west! I know from whence it blows,
From what far peaks and sun-proof snows
It comes. The murmur of its voice,
That almost makes these city streets rejoice,
Was learned in the cool tops of yellow pines,
And caught from torrents dropping in thin lines
Down ancient precipices. Wind too wild,
Too swift to be held prisoner like me
In these stone walls and iron cages piled
One on the other—wind that passes, free
To range the world and find the heights again—
Oh, take me with you, back to peace from pain!

"Movie" or "Anti-Movie," You'll Like—

Dicky's Continuity

Because It Shows You Some of the Absurdities of the Screen—and What Is There That Isn't Absurd at Times?—Because It's Funny, and Because, Aside From All This, It Contains a Husky Dose of Human Interest

By Walter De Leon

EVERYBODY on the Realife lot liked the Judge. Probably not one-half of the directors, camera-men, actors and office employees knew his full name. Positively no one of them knew from whence he had drifted into the Southern California movie studio some ten years before and become a fixture in the scenario department. Knowledge of human nature and literary values already were his; and when, after a year or two, he had displayed a mastery of the technique of film-writing and an uncanny faculty for picking successes, the Realife powers had given him complete control of the department.

His nickname was a respectful and appropriate tribute, not alone to his official position but likewise to his appearance and personality. In the words of Dicky Purce, who wrote two-reel pie comedies for the Judge: "He's so darn *human*. Tell him your troubles and he understands 'em. If you're right, he'll do what he can to help you. When you're wrong, he can make you see it without raising within you a fierce yearn to swing a Dempsey at him."

Somewhere between forty and fifty, tall, broad-shouldered, with a full head of snow-white hair, the Judge's rather small, deep-set eyes shone with a kindliness as genuine as the clasp of his hand. His was a face not easily forgotten, principally because of the deep-chiseled parallel lines which tracked each of his lean cheeks. About his eyes and mouth were other odd lines—lines that bespoke to Bob Townely, the star director, with whom the Judge had built and shared a rambling bachelor bungalow, an intimate acquaintance with grief and disheartenment. But close as were Townely and the older man, the director was never encouraged to scale the invisible wall behind which the Judge secluded his earlier years.

Certain initials graven in the silver of long-used toilet articles had convinced Townely that even the name the Judge wrote on his pay-checks might probably be not the one his father had borne. Which meant little less than nothing to Townely.

It remained for little Stella Roberts, who had started to put Mary Pickford out of business and finished by taking the Judge's dictation, to epitomize her boss's character. "Sure, everybody likes him," she said, "because he likes everybody."

One drowsy, droning midsummer afternoon the Judge sat nodding at the desk in his private office. A loud knock on the glass of the door brought him up blinking. With customary impetuosity, young Dicky Purce plunged across the room and slapped a manuscript on the desk.

"I've got you a bird this time, Judge!" he blurted. "A knockout! You'll go batty over it. It's got everything—comedy, mystery, drama, raw human emotions, heart-interest, and a kick at the finish that De Maupassant and O. Henry right now are wishing they'd thought of."

"All yours?" asked the Judge, his eyes twinkling. Dicky had the grace to flush.

"N-no. I got the yarn—part of it—from a man in the club-car on my trip down from Frisco yesterday."

"A true story?" The Judge skeptically picked up the script. For he knew the difficulty of presenting any authentic history of human happening in a manner to convince a fiction-feeding public.

"This is different," Dicky argued. "A dandy little old chap gave me the facts. He's making a last tour of inspection out of New York before being taken into partnership. The incidents of this scenario took place when he returned from his first trip, over ten years ago."

The Judge suddenly leaned forward, his eye attracted by a name among the cast of characters typed on the front page.

"Where did you get these names?"

"I used the real names, or, rather, the same names this chap Sinnot used in telling me the story. 'Course they'll have to be changed. I guess you'll make a lot of changes. I've done the script in continuity, but you've kept me doing two-reel comics so long that it's hard for me, with my kitchen-ware and bakery vocabulary, to express dramatic intensity properly. But this script has the idea all right, all right."

The Judge nodded, already reading attentively. Dicky cleared his throat.

"Er—Judge, when you—er—when you come to the scenes where Margaret Mannor appears, picture Eulalie Spinson in the part. She—she'd *eat* it."

Again the Judge nodded and grunted an assent. Whereupon Dicky softly closed the door from the outside. The Judge reread the cast and then the long opening title:

CHESTER SINNOT—a young business man.

Clara—his bride.

Sydney Harton—a rising attorney.

Margaret Mannor—Harton's *fiancée*.

Senator Chesterfield—State political boss.

Three other politicians; Harton's Japanese valet; Margaret's chauffeur; policemen, etc.

Opening Title

There be philosophers who maintain that Providence waits not for the trumpet of judgment-day, but rather dispenses the reward of man's deeds while still he remains in the flesh.

Less erudite folk, reckoning naught of theology or conscience, are wont to attribute the conditions and fortunes of terrestrial existence to a double-faced deity, Luck.

Once in a while is found a man who believes in nothing but himself, who scoffs at friendship as an entangling weakness, and who drives to his destiny with the twin whips of Fear and Coercion ever ready to his hand. Such a man is Sydney Harton, attorney at law.

Iris in on a man seated at a desk in a small, well-furnished library. He is tall and dark, slightly over thirty, with small, hard eyes and tightly compressed lips. In front of him on the desk is framed a printed motto which reads:

I Like to See a Man With a Kick Coming Get It.

Iris in further to show the other occupants of the room. These are four men of contrasting appearance, sitting or standing in different attitudes which plainly reveal their displeasure and perturbation. The light from a street-lamp is seen through the window, and the hands of the desk clock show the hour to be midnight.

Richly and elegantly tailored, distinctive and distinguished, Senator Chesterfield, a man of fifty-odd, reclines gracefully in an armchair. A slight frown ruffles his well-bred features as he absently watches the smoke curl from his cigarette.

Close-up of Senator Chesterfield registering that he is considering a matter of far-reaching importance.

Close-up of Harton looking keenly under lowered brows at the senator, as though to fathom his thoughts.

Long shot of Harton glancing in turn at the two men in business suits who stand glowering in one corner of the room, and then at the short, tubby, flashily dressed man, black derby shoved far back on his head, belligerently chewing the dead butt of a cigar as he scowls out the window into the night. Harton, an unpleasant smile on his lips, rises and addresses the other.

Now I'll tell you what I want—the nomination for prosecuting attorney.

The short fat man at the window whirls toward Harton. Talking loudly, with vehement gestures, he objects angrily and profanely to Harton's request. The two men standing across the room add their protests to his. Harton stands quietly listening, his teeth gleaming through a contemptuous smile.

Baffled and exasperated, the short man turns in appeal to the elegant Chesterfield. The senator shakes his head slowly and says:

> What's the use? Harton's got something on every one of us.

They all nervously face Harton, who levels his finger and in blunt, brutal sentences discloses the blackmailing power he holds over them. Then, insolently folding his hands behind him, he snaps,

> Now, d—n you, I get it, don't I?

The senator, endeavoring to disguise his disgust, taps the ash from his cigarette, shrugs his perfectly tailored shoulders and laughs sarcastically as he says to Harton,

> Congratulations!

Without another word spoken, the others follow the senator from the room. As they leave, the telephone-bell rings. Harton picks up the instrument.

Flash to a young, beautifully formed woman gowned in daring *décolleté*, on whose fair face the marks of dissipation as yet rest lightly. Telephone in jeweled hand, she stands in a private dining-room on the second floor of one of Broadway's gilded blind tigers. At a table sit a putty-faced man with weak eyes and a flapper whose charms are fading even faster than the henna in her hair.

THE LATEST FRONT-PAGE DIVORCÉE ANNA LUCREZIA MCWHATER MCNAUGHT

Close-up of Mrs. McNaught holding the 'phone in one hand and with a slender finger of the other wiping the lip-rouge from the corners of her mouth and moistening the mascara in her curving eyebrows.

Her face reveals that she is one of those women who, from the age of fifteen on, get away with everything including murder, because kind-hearted people keep saying: "She never had a chance. You know who her mother was, of course."

IN THE library Harton removes the receiver and answers the ring.

At the other end of the wire, Mrs. McNaught pleads enticingly with the attorney to join the gay party she is giving to celebrate the divorce Harton has procured for her. Turning her back in all its powdered peerlessness to the couple at the table, she says alluringly into the transmitter:

> I've been longing for you all day, Syd. And besides, I want to give you a check for your fee before I leave town to-morrow.

Harton hesitates, glances at the clock on his desk, and finally promises to join her. Summoning his Japanese valet, he asks for his hat and coat. While waiting, he walks to the window and gazes out upon the lighted street, smiling in derisive triumph. Fade out.

(NOTE—It is left to the skill of the director to make plain to the audience what Harton is thinking about.)

CHESTER SINNOT RETURNS HOME A DAY AHEAD OF HIS SCHEDULE

Fade in on a plain-featured, plump, undersized young man whose shoes look too big for him, stepping from a taxi-cab in front of an apartment-house, traveling-bag in hand.

One glance at his cherubic countenance and we immediately recognize the type of chap who, instead of telegraphing his wife when to expect him, elects to surprise her. His rounded face is as yet unscored, nor are his eyes shadowed by the suffering on his part of any of the deep-rooted vital emotions which harass and hamper, delay and distress so many entrants in Life's great handicap. Indeed, Chester is one of that placid throng who, reading the sublime depths and heights to which men and women of noble passions have been transported, wonder if somebody hasn't exaggerated matters a bit. The sort of chap who serves as clowns for the host on Olympus.

(NOTE TO PRODUCER—If you think the audience would understand this allusion to mythology, that last sentence above would make an effective subtitle.)

We next see Chester emerging from the elevator and tiptoeing to the door of his apartment. He looks at his watch, which shows the hour of seven A.M. Stealthily he inserts his key, smiling in anticipation of the surprise he is about to afford his wife.

Dissolve into vision of a young, beautiful woman asleep in bed, her fair curly tresses temptingly tossed upon her pillow. Her left hand lies outside the covers, showing a simple gold wedding-ring. Dissolve out vision back to Chester. He enters the apartment.

Walking to the door of the bedroom, he peers in. To his consternation, the bed is empty. A second glance shows it has not even been occupied. He calls,

Clara, my darling!

Not even echo answers. He runs into the dining-room. On the table a vase of dying flowers, the water discolored and malodorous, indicates more than one day's neglect. In the kitchen he notices that the pan under the ice-box has overflowed freely. On the window-sill, a bottle of Grade B milk stands curdling.

(NOTE—These are the things, these illuminating flashes of homely detail, which, in spite of one school of film-writers, make subtitles unnecessary and useless.)

Still searching for some clue to her absence, Chester runs into his wife's dressing-room and is appalled to discover that her traveling-bag of hallowed honeymoon memory is missing. Endeavoring to control his rising panic, he hurries to the telephone and calls up several of their closest friends. Not the least bit of information does he glean concerning his wandering wife. Disappointment and chagrin by this time have been succeeded in Chester's mind by gravest apprehension.

He feels the need of a stimulant, and so goes into the kitchen to prepare a pot of coffee. As he reaches for the container, he espies upon the table the photograph of a man. It is a clipping from a newspaper.

Close-up of the photo in Chester's hand. We at once recognize the saturnine features of Mr. Sydney Harton, but——

Chester plainly registers his ignorance of the identity of its original.

His eyes glued hypnotically to the clipping, he mechanically prepares the coffee. Long he gazes at the photo, oblivious of the fleeting moments, the while thoughts unworthily suspicious and ominously sinister rise unbidden to his brain. A man's likeness—he repeats—upon the kitchen table where his wife might feast her eyes upon it while she stewed the Tuesday kidneys and fried the Friday fish. His surging suspicions slowly crystallize. The fact that Clara had not notified her friends of her intended absence from home—was not that significant evidence of her duplicity? Alas! How quick weak mortal is to suspicion!

At this moment the coffee boils over and extinguishes the gas-flame. Chester, roused, fills a cup. Hastily he gulps it—it scalds his mouth. Waiting for it to cool, he opens the morning paper. The first head-line to greet him reads:

MRS. SLOAN DENIES HUSBAND'S CHARGES

Under which follow the details of an aged millionaire's senile objections to his young bride's train of *attachés*.

Squirming unhappily, Chester turns to the next column. It is headed:

WALL STREET BROKER SHOOTS WIFE

Unable to tear his eyes away, Chester becomes acquainted with the physical reactions of a man who had unexpectedly returned to his home only to learn that his continued absence had been depended upon.

Chester again burns his mouth with the coffee and turns to the second page of the daily. Prominently displayed across two columns he sees:

MRS. ANDRES A BIGAMIST

BOTH HUSBANDS ARE TRAVELING SALESMEN

DOUBLE DECEPTION DISCOVERED WHEN HUSBAND NUMBER TWO MISSES TRAIN

Harrowed beyond endurance, Chester crumples the newspaper into a ball and throws it the length of the room. His elbow strikes the spoon standing in his cup, upsetting it and spilling hot coffee over his trousers. As he jumps to his feet in pain, his eye falls again on the photo of Harton, and he cries,

My G—d, this is terrible!

(NOTE—The above newspaper head-lines, etc., are *bona fide*. There is no doubt but what they will get by the censor. The new censorship rulings permit quotations from reputable publications.)

FLASH to Clara, Chester's dainty and demure wife, whose features we have seen in the vision of her in bed. She is standing on the veranda of a suburban cottage bidding an affectionate—close-up—farewell to another young woman of about the same age.

CHESTER DOESN'T LIKE HER CHUM'S HUSBAND, SO CLARA ONLY VISITS HER WHEN CHESTER IS OUT OF TOWN

Long shot of Clara kissing her school chum, smilingly stepping into a taxi and driving away.

Cut to Chester, reading the article about the woman with two husbands while he rubs his coffee-soaked trousers-leg with a dish-towel.

THE SOCIAL STANDING HARTON NEEDS FOR HIS SOARING AMBITION—MARGARET MANNOR, A WEALTHY DÉBUTANTE

Open diaphragm on the sun-parlor of a magnificent home on Riverside Drive. Harton, pale, impeccably groomed, is holding the hand of a classically beautiful, exquisitely gowned girl of twenty.

(NOTE—If Miss Spinson is cast for this part, insert here a close-up of her. Use a soft-focus lens for this in order to bring out the high lights in her hair, which photographs exceptionally well when not too heavily lighted.)

Harton tells Margaret he has received the coveted nomination. She congratulates him with unexpected warmth. Encouraged, Harton masterfully draws her close to him and murmurs:

With you as a glorious incentive, I shall stride on. The next step is the mayoralty, then the governorship, then the U. S. Senate, and finally——

Margaret, prettily superstitious, checks him by sealing his lips with a white forefinger. Harton's eyes gleam avidly as he asks,

When are you going to announce our engagement?

With lowered eyelids, Margaret considers her reply to this momentous question. She does not see the dangerous expression of calculating cunning and cupidity which flits across Harton's dark features. She answers,

Unless father objects, we can announce it at the dinner we are giving to-night to the ambassador from Armenia.

(NOTE—The author chose the ambassador from Armenia in order to avoid rousing any political antagonism in the minds of the audience, and because, on account of the many drives for the starving population of that country, the name is more or less familiar to theatre patrons.)

Harton registers his delight and gratification. He tells the girl he has an appointment with her father that morning, at which time the financier is to further instruct him in the manipulation of some stock Harton is speculating in under her father's friendly guidance. Margaret impulsively replies:

I'll go with you to father's office. There we can talk about our engagement announcement.

She rings for her French maid and asks her for her furs and her limousine.

Flash to Clara alighting from the taxi in front of the apartment-house.

Everybody's Magazine, February, 1922

Cut to Chester, dreadful, concentrated hatred burning in his fevered orbs as he gazes at the newspaper clipping of Harton.

Double Exposure—dissolve the photo into a rattlesnake which rears its hissing head and rattles at Chester. Dissolve snake back into photo. Chester puts his hand over his eyes.

He hears the scrape of a key in a lock—the closing of a door. He turns and sees entering the room—

HIS wife! In glad surprise, Clara drops her traveling-bag and lightly runs toward her husband, her arms outstretched in blissful greeting. Consumed with jealousy and other ignoble emotions, Chester dramatically repulses her. Wounded and nonplused, Clara looks at him in pitiable dismay.

Chester, dear husband, what——

Her innocent expression infuriates the young husband. He seizes the newspaper photo and thrusts it toward Clara.

Who is this man?

Clara glances briefly at the picture and then turns her perplexed eyes to Chester's twitching countenance.

I'm sure I don't know.

WHAT!

The startled exclamation fairly leaps from Chester's lips. He wonders—can it be all a mistake?

(NOTE—In case Chester's wondering fails to register on the screen, use the last word above as a title.)

This second of sanity is tainted by a flood of doubts loosed by his wife's compassionate question:

Is there anything wrong, Chessy?

That is precisely what Chester yearns yet fears to find out. He launches into an incoherent recital of his fancied wrongs.

I thought I'd surprise you. I did—but not like I planned. But I ain't going to be trifled with—even by you. *Who is the man?*

Clara begins to see he is serious, and so, with another glance at the photo, she says, her honest eyes gazing full into his:

I never saw that picture before. Where did you get it?

Chester, in hopeless triumph, tells her,

On your kitchen table!

(NOTE TO DIRECTOR—This is one of the great moments of the play, one of the moments upon which its success depends. It must be given plenty of footage.)

Clara is patently dumfounded. Chester mistakes her stupefaction for the evidence of guilt discovered. Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, Clara realizes the enormity of her husband's suspicions. But before her numbed brain can rally protests to her defense, there bursts from Chester's dried lips the pent-up anguish of the past hour:

Where was you last night?

There is no longer any doubt in Clara's mind as to what Chester means, but she hesitates to tell him of her disobedience to his orders anent visiting her chum. Chester again misinterprets her silence.

(NOTE—Chester's inclination at this point is to take his revolver from the desk drawer; but the censors wouldn't permit it.)

With an inarticulate cry, dangling the picture in his palsied fingers in front of his wife's face, he thunders,

Choose between us; I—or him!

This last insult Clara cannot tolerate. Chester has gone too far. She opens her mouth to tell him so when a sudden thought, a dimly discerned solution of the situation, arrests her. With a quick gesture she says,

Give me thàt!

Chester imagines his wife has chosen the stranger. His world crumbles about him.

LOVE'S TENDER DREAM IS SHATTERED

Grabbing his hat from the table, he staggers brokenly across the room. Turning a tragic face for one last look at his lost Clara, he trips over the honeymoon hand-bag on the floor and falls through the door out of the apartment.

Cut to hallway, showing continuation of Chester's fall.

Flash to Margaret and Harton in a limousine, which is threading the traffic around Columbus Circle.

(NOTE—Of course it is not necessary to go to New York to get this scene. It can be tricked easily by buying a strip of film from any of the news-weeklies showing the traffic at the Circle on a sunny day. Show a few feet of this and, after thus planting the location in the minds of the audience, cut to a close-up of Margaret and Harton seated in a limousine. If Miss Spinson is cast for Margaret, the director should see that in all outdoor scenes she is dressed in dark clothes. She photographs perfectly in yellows and browns.)

Harton shows Margaret a page in a small memorandum-book. It reads:

10:30 Mannor—his office.
2:00 Receive delegation Prohibition Party.
7:30 Dine with Margaret—Biltmore.

Margaret lays a gloved finger on the first entry and inquires,

Listen, Sydney; have you invested much on father's advice?

Harton tries to be nonchalant as he replies,

Every nickel I could scrape together.

CUT to Chester Sinnot hanging to a strap in a crowded subway car. He keeps forming the same succession of syllables:

I'll find him! I'll find him! I'll find him!

The limousine draws up to the curb in front of a lofty sky-scraper in the Wall Street district. (See note on Columbus Circle scene.) Harton assists Margaret to the pavement, and they start toward the revolving door of the building.

Chester, at the same moment, reaches the building and turns to enter. Engrossed in his torment, he narrowly averts colliding with Margaret. He apologizes and absentmindedly stands to one side to permit her to precede him through the door. Harton is so surprised by this small-town politeness that he thanks Chester audibly.

Young Mr. Sinnot glances toward the sound of the voice and sees Harton. His eyes widen; his mouth drops open; his hands relax as he mentally checks the living features before him with their photographic reproduction in his apartment. Fade out; fade in photo; fade back.

Satisfied, if not content, Chester's eyes, mouth and hands contract. Shouting,

Keep my wife out all night, will you?

his right fist swiftly describes a short arc which comes to rest upon Mr. Harton's startled left optic. This is instantly followed by an equally powerful left hand, whose energetic flight is abruptly halted by Mr. Harton's gaping mouth.

As the attorney reels blindly backward, Chester lunges again. The blow lands under Harton's ear, knocking him off his balance. As he falls, the side of his head strikes the edge of the building, slightly stunning him. Before further damage can be done, an incensed policeman envelops Chester in his burly arms.

(NOTE—This is one of the great moments of the piece. The director should take this scene twice; once with Harton using catsup for blood for those states which do not censor blood, and again with Harton's face whitened with powder to make him pale for Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois. Would further suggest close-ups, nine-foot foregrounds and three cameras shooting from different angles. One of these should have a wide-angle lens so, in case Chester should actually hit Harton and knock him out of focus, the action would not be lost. This fight scene, with two good men in the parts, should be good for a hundred and fifty feet. Break it up with close-ups of Margaret registering a gamut of emotions. Miss Spinson has saved many a rotten fight with her facial expressions. DO NOT direct Miss Spinson in scenes like this through a megaphone. It is apt to make her artificial.)

A second officer shoves his way through the crowd. He recognizes Harton. Roughly ascertaining that Harton has suffered no serious injury, the officer inquires,

Whaddaya want did with him, Mr. Harton?

Harton has far too much at stake to risk more publicity than is unavoidable, so, presuming upon his acquaintance with Police Department affairs, he tells the officer,

Lock him up, Abie; but don't put him on the blotter.

As the officers conduct the mute Mr. Sinnot down the street, Margaret quickly reenters the limousine. To her chauffeur she says,

Follow the patrolmen and their prisoner.

Harton is assisted to his feet and gingerly wipes his face with a handkerchief. Looking around for Margaret, he sees the limousine slowly crawling along the curb a few paces behind Chester and his escort. Close-up registering intense astonishment. Fade out.

THAT AFTERNOON AT TWO

Fade in on Harton in dressing-gown and slippers, uncomfortably reclining in a comfortable chair in his bedroom. A large section of nude beef is festooned over one eye. Sweetly odorous absorbent cotton is taped across the corner of his mouth. An ice-pack is strapped to a protuberance on the side of his head. He is gazing despondently at the leaf of his note-book whereon the day's engagements are penciled. Sitting near the window is the fastidious Senator Chesterfield, a cynical smile showing on his smooth face.

Flash to Japanese valet admitting into an anteroom two stern-visaged middle-aged women and a slight, clerical gentleman who wear the insignia of the Prohibition Party Campaign Committee.

In the bedroom, in answer to Harton's exasperated question: "Didn't you find out anything about him?" the senator replies:

He wouldn't even give his name. An envelope in his pocket was addressed to Chester Sinnot.

This name means absolutely nothing to Harton. The Japanese valet enters, announces the arrival of the Prohibition delegation and withdraws. Harton groans:

How can I receive them looking like this? And I need their backing vitally.

Senator Chesterfield suggests,

Tell them you were attacked by a gangster because of your reform views.

Harton shakes his head in impatient negation.

Fifty people heard that nut yell, "Keep my wife out all night, will you?"

The elegant senator cudgels his wits for a convincing fiction designed to engage the sympathy of the waiting delegation.

Tell them it's a lie—campaign mud-throwing.

Harton, in answer, points to the front page of a yellow afternoon journal. Beneath a picture of Anna Lucrezia McWhater McNaught in a bathing-suit that would start any one of Mack Sennet's cameras cranking itself, there is a brief article:

In reply to the reporter's questions, the notorious Mrs. McNaught said: "It is true that Mr. Harton obtained my divorce decree yesterday. It is furthermore true that he was a member of the party I entertained last night. It is also true that Mr. McNaught is an extremely jealous man. But I know nothing of the attack on Mr. Harton."

MARGARET MANNOR in her boudoir, is perusing the same article. She goes swiftly to an antique *escritoire* in an alcove, and taking a letter from an envelope, skims through it till she finds this paragraph:

Let me again assure you, dearest, that my association with Mrs. McNaught is *purely professional.* After her case is decided, I trust our trails shall never again cross.

Close-up of Margaret, her eyes flashing fire, her lips curling bitterly as she says,

And I—utter fool—believed him!

A tear springs from her eye and rolls unchecked down her cheek. Eighteen-foot shot of Margaret unhappily seating herself at the *escritoire* and drawing pen, ink and paper toward her.

Close-up of tear splashing on the paper. (Very effective.)

(NOTE—This is one of the great moments of the piece. Provided Miss Spinson plays the part, if the director during this scene will have some one at a piano play "Keep the Home Fires Burning," Miss Spinson will weep real tears as long as the piano keeps playing—thus obviating the necessity of using glycerin.

Warning: The same tune on a phonograph has no effect on Miss Spinson.)

In Harton's room the senator lays the newspaper aside and shakes his head ominously.

In the anteroom the three delegates are finding the wait tedious. At this moment the Japanese valet enters with a tray on which are several articles completely hidden by a large serviette. The slight clerical gentleman asks the valet if he has informed Mr. Harton of their presence. The valet turns his head to answer. Coincidently, his foot strikes the leg of a small table, which causes him to stumble. The tray tilts precariously. Juggling it in an effort to balance it, the valet steps back, planting his heel upon the fallen instep of the stouter lady. The lady's large hand, flying to her agonized face, hits the edge of the tray. From under the serviette roll a decanter of Scotch whisky, a siphon, ice and glasses. The decanter caroms off the table-edge and strikes the floor. The stopper falls out, immediately followed by the gurgle of the laughter of imprisoned bootleggers.

The delegates rise. Simultaneously they sniff the pungent fumes permeating the room, gaze in enlightened amazement at each other, once again sniff the contaminated atmosphere, and, leaving their noses in sniffing position, solemnly, sternly follow them out of the room.

The valet enters the bedroom and reports to Harton the delegation's Volsteadily maintained progress. Harton, with a gesture of despair, exclaims,

That means I lose the election!

The valet, at the street door, takes a delicately tinted envelope from a messenger-boy.

In Harton's room, the elegant senator is saying,

Perhaps in another year or two——

The valet enters and gives the tinted envelope to his master, who, biting his lips in anxiety, opens it and reads:

—my surprise at learning of your untruthfulness, as shown by the afternoon papers, was only equaled by my discovery that your assailant was not Mr. McNaught. You had entirely neglected to mention Mrs. Sinnot to me.

No doubt I shall some day recover from this cruel blow to my pride. But the blow to my faith—never!

I am returning your ring.

MARGARET MANNOR.

Harton buries his battered head in trembling fingers. Senator Chesterfield, who has been reading the market reports in the paper, now shows a paragraph to Harton.

It is rumored that Mannor advised his intimate friends to unload their stock and take their profit before he started smashing the market this afternoon.

Harton's head sinks to his chest.

PENNILESS!

The scene changes to a police station. The desk-sergeant is talking into a telephone. In front of the desk, Clara is regarding with superior air her shamed and contrite husband.

IN HARTON'S room the senator answers a ring of the 'phone. After a moment, he turns to Harton.

Sinnot's wife, at the station, says it's all a mistake.

Harton's only reply is:

A lot of good that does me now!

The senator looks at his companion's bowed head, shrugs his shoulders and says into the 'phone,

Turn him loose.

He hangs up the receiver. Taking his hat, gloves and stick from a chair, he asks in a perfunctory but polished manner if he can be of further assistance. Harton wearily shakes his head negatively. An expression of pity momentarily softens the senator's features, and he makes his exit. After a moment Harton raises his face and says,

I must go away—far away—and forget.

And, calling his valet, he instructs him to pack his trunks.

Wandering disconsolately into the library, Harton reviews the complete catastrophe which has overtaken him. His political future has been irremediably ruined. His social ambitions and the woman of his heart are irretrievably lost. His financial status has been irreparably wrecked. In genuine distress he ejaculates,

Can there be some fatal flaw in my character?

His eye falls upon the printed motto on desk: "I Like to See a Man With a Kick Coming Get It." He thinks deeply.

LIKE THE FIRST PALE PINK OF THE RISING SUN PIERCING THE GRAYISH MORNING MISTS, ENLIGHTENMENT DAWNS UPON HIM

(NOTE—This title should be illustrated and colored.)

Slowly Harton removes the motto from the frame and tears it to bits. Then, with an appealing glance toward the heaven he has all but forgotten, he begs,

But *who* is Sinnot; and *why?*

Clara and Chester enter their apartment. With assertively virtuous and recriminatory step, Clara leads the way into the dining-room.

She takes the photo of Sydney Harton from the table and gives it to her husband with the command:

Look on the other side and be ashamed.

Chester turns the clipping to the obverse side. There meets his startled eyes the secret:

TO-DAY'S HINTS TO BRIDES

JELLY ROLL

1 cup sugar
1 cup flour
3 eggs
1½ teaspoons baking-powder

Beat eggs and sugar well, sift in flour—

Conscience-stricken as he comprehends the injustice he has done Clara, Chester drops to one knee and humbly presses his lips to his wife's hand. Touched by this symbol of his repentence, Clara stoops over and tenderly kisses his head. Fade out.

(NOTE—Do not hurry this scene. This is the great moment.)

THE Judge thoughtfully laid the manuscript on his desk and leaned back in his chair. Reflectively he gazed over the brown hills and brilliant greens of Hollywood, glinting golden under the Southern California sun. Through the open window pushed faintly perfumed puffs of the afternoon breeze. About him, pleasantly indistinct, murmured the cheerful activity of the studio, and reaching softly across the lot the tones of Townely's voice directing an Indian-village scene through a megaphone.

"This is better," the Judge decided. "This is where I belong; not——"

Dicky Purce burst in without warning.

"How do you like it, Judge? A pippin, isn't it?"

The Judge smiled.

"I'm afraid it's too true to be good. However, we'll try it. You won't object if I make a few minor changes in titles and——"

"You always do," Dicky interrupted, grinning.

"You"—the Judge hesitated—"you don't think the audience would be interested in seeing what became of Harton? Whether or not the beating Sinnot gave him effected a reformation? Your idea was that the licking was the turning-point in Harton's life, his—er—his great moment, wasn't it?"

"Sure! But I couldn't figure what he'd do. I asked Sinnot what became of Harton, but he hadn't the slightest idea."

"I don't suppose his reconstruction would interest the public, anyway. It's easy to guess, of course, that Margaret Mannor formed a brilliant marriage a few years later with a young man of her own set.

"Sure! Listen, Judge; any chance to get Miss Spinson for that part?"

"Not a chance, son. Miss Spinson and I are—er—contemplating an extensive honeymoon tour of the East in the—er—immediate future."

"Good-night! I mean—congratulations—all the luck in the world, Judge!" Dicky gasped, embarrassed. Slowly, unbelievingly, he backed toward the door. "And I thought I stood in pretty str— What a lucky son of a gun *you* turned out to be! Good-night!"

And Dicky was gone.

As the Judge placed the manuscript in a desk drawer, his eyes twinkled and he sighed happily in tremendous relief.

"By Gad, after all these years, I sure am glad to learn why Sinnot walloped me!"

The face of Mr. Johnson was now a study in consternation and bewilderment. Lundy gathered up the money with a sweep of his hand.

Dr. Goodrich Relates Another Adventure

The Magic Wheel

You Have Heard of Many Systems for Beating the Gambler's Game—Breaking the Bank at Monte Carlo, for Instance—but You Haven't Heard of This One, for It's Brand-New, and It Will Work—if You Are a Scientist

By Stoddard Goodhue

Illustration by J. M. Clement

AS YOUNG Marcus Garner came through the lobby of the Hotel Admiral and stood on the sidewalk waiting for a taxi that was being summoned by the lordly uniformed "starter," he experienced a feeling of trepidation.

This feeling did not vanish but was rather accentuated when, a few moments later, he found himself being whirled in a taxi-cab through the hurly-burly of traffic along Forty-second Street, round the corner of the Grand Central Station and over the smooth pavement of a somewhat less brilliantly lighted avenue.

"Old man, you're scared—downright scared," he commented aloud, and then drew himself a little more erect, glancing through the window at the back of the driver's head, for an instant questioning whether he could have been overheard. But he laughed at the absurdity of this idea, considering the hubbub of the street, and reiterated his self-accusation in a lower tone but with greater emphasis, "You were never so scared in your life, old man."

Presently the taxi stopped at the impressive entrance of a huge apartment-house. A somber-looking man in livery was rather ostentatiously opening the door of the vehicle, and a few moments later his double was ushering Garner into a spacious hall and motioning him to a telephone-desk, where a girl with tremendous masses of black hair coiled about her ears and piled about her head catching a glimpse of him, suddenly began to appraise his six feet and odd inches of slenderly robust, athletic figure with eyes at once critical and approving.

The girl smiled a little—just why, the young man rather wondered—as he gave his message. She deftly pulled out one wire-plug here and inserted another there, and announced into her transmitter that Mr. Garner was calling on Miss Alden.

She listened a moment, then pointed across the hallway. "Take the elevator at the rear; sixth floor," she directed. She was still smiling cryptically. He wondered why. But only vaguely. His mind was a jumble of emotions. Half a minute later he touched a button beside a door the elevator-boy had designated—among several that opened on the hall. Then a Japanese man servant with masklike face and deferential manner took his coat and hat and ushered him along the spacious and richly furnished hall to the drawing-room on the right. And now he found, to his astonishment, that he was not frightened at all.

In point of fact, there was at the moment no space left in his mind for any emotion except wonderment as he beheld a sort of vision, the outstanding feature of which was a figure in a mauve-colored gown coming forward to meet him—an incredibly slender, gracile figure, with white arms and neck, gleaming white teeth, and dark friendly eyes that sparkled, and a wealth of auburn hair with the radiance of an aureole where the light struck it.

And this was the apparition of which he had been afraid! Mary Alden—just as he remembered her, just as he knew she would be—only, with beauty accentuated beyond his memory-dreams—with that quality of—how should one say it?—ethereality, spirituality, that made her different from every other woman.

And the brawny athlete whose hand she was cordially clasping now, and who was smiling back at her and marveling anew at her beauty and at the ethereal quality of her radiant personality, had in the background of his mind only a vague reminiscent ghost of that sense of trepidation that had been haunting his mind.

"It is good to see you again," said the girl, with simple earnestness, her hand resting for a moment in his.

And all the thoughts that surged up in his mind found expression only in the banal,

"And it certainly is good to see you, after all these weeks, Miss Alden."

Then young Garner found himself greeting Mary Alden's aunt, Mrs. Courtney, and being presented to other guests—a Mrs. Bigelow and her husband; a Mrs. Lambert, as he caught the name, a tall, slender woman as aristocratic in bearing as Mrs. Courtney; one man, short and rather portly, with gray mustache and bald crown; another, tall and gaunt, with a shock of hair so black that one suspected the authenticity of its color. But these random estimates, or, indeed, any estimates at all, of Mrs. Courtney's guests came to young Garner only vaguely and as transient and evanescent thoughts then or at any other time during the evening. Nor had he anything more than a vague or penumbral consciousness of the equipment or furnishings of the drawing-room which he had first entered, or of the dining-room, where he presently found himself. He knew only that Mary Alden was at his side, that she seemed genuinely glad to see him, that he was being received hospitably, even cordially, by the very dignified and rather austere person, Mary's aunt. of whom—as he had learned on the occasion of their second meeting, out there in Los Angeles—a good many people who thought well of themselves stood much in awe.

A wave of self-consciousness came over the young man as he heard Mrs. Courtney, at one stage of the conversation, telling her guests of her first meeting with Garner in France, where she had been in charge of a hostess-house. He appreciated the friendliness of the recital, much as he wished that she had not felt called upon to dwell on what he insisted was only a trivial service he had found opportunity to render.

"It seemed far from trivial to us," Mary Alden interpolated. "But I know Colonel Garner would prefer not to have us talk about it," she added quickly. "He was just telling me about some of his mining experiences down in Mexico," she continued. "It is interesting to hear something about things down there at first hand."

And thus she had shifted the conversation in a safe direction and given the grateful young man at her side another illustration of that quality of sympathetic responsiveness which was not the least alluring aspect of her personality.

IMMEDIATELY after dinner they set out for a play, going in a big limousine, which, Garner inferred, belonged to the Bigelows. The young man would infinitely have preferred a quiet evening at home with Mary Alden, but he was obliged to content himself with a promise of that on a later occasion.

"Not to-morrow night," she had said. "To-morrow is Tuesday. We shall be away. But on Wednesday evening, if you wish."

"I certainly do," he assured her earnestly. They were coming out of the theatre and were separated a little from the others. The touch of her arm thrilled him. She looked up at him, smiling, and he read, or thought he read, something in her eyes that made his heart leap. It seemed too good to be true. Ever since he had seen this girl on that second occasion, out there in the West, and for a few days had been privileged to escort her—always accompanied by her aunt—about the fruit ranch of the friend where they were stopping, he had dreamed of this promised visit to New York, and perpetually striven to buoy up his courage to the point of giving himself assurance that he would dare ask her the question that was clamoring in his mind.

At the hotel that afternoon, when he had telephoned to her, and later in the taxi when he was on the way to her home, he had been the victim of a veritable panic, had assured himself that it was utter presumption to dare hope that this wonder-woman could single him out and care for him as he had singled her out and cared for her.

"Why should she?" he asked himself. "Who and what am I to dare hope anything like that?"

But now, as her eyes met his frankly, there at the theatre exit, he felt courage and hope and even confidence flame up within him.

Of course there was no chance for confidences there or in the limousine afterward; and when they dropped him at his hotel there was opportunity only for the usual banalities of parting—except that, just at the last, Mary Alden had leaned forward a little to murmur:

"Until Wednesday, then. I am sorry it cannot be to-morrow."

ABOUT nine o'clock the following evening, two men, who bore the unmistakable aspect of prosperous Westerners, were standing in the lobby of the Hotel Admiral, engaged in animated conversation.

"I don't know about that, Lundy," said the taller man of the two, a wiry, athletic type of citizen, with keen blue eyes and an incisive manner of speaking. "I don't know that I quite like the idea. If it were out home, where we know the people— But in this town, they tell me, you can't even slip a pistol in your hip-pocket without committing a penitentiary offense."

"So I understand," said the other. He was a well-set man, with jovial, boyish countenance that seemed to belie the baldness of his crown. "But who wants to carry a pistol? You and I don't need one in order to take care of ourselves in any company in this effete old town, do we?"

The tall man looked a little dubious.

"Ordinarily not," he admitted. "But suppose this game is crooked?"

"It won't be crooked. The fellow that steered me into it tells me it is a perfectly safe gentleman's game—but with a limit high enough to be interesting. Just a bunch of fellows who are friends—Wall Street men and that sort of thing, so he says. But— Hello! There is just the man we ought to have along with us. That tall young fellow over there by the desk, I mean. Name's Mark Garner. Mining engineer. Had charge of big mine down in Mexico and stood off Villa and his bunch."

"Oh, yes; I know about him. Has the reputation of being able to lick his weight in wildcats and all that sort of thing."

The tall man was beckoning to young Garner and, a moment later, was saying:

"Garner, shake hands with my friend Curtis—from Boise. Same line of work as we are. Here with me putting through a little deal in Wall Street." A smile of dubious interpretation. Then, after a pause: "Curtis and I were just planning to go out and see a little of the town. I was driving round this afternoon in a taxi, and the driver told me he could take me to a place where there is a gentleman's game arranged for amusement. Curtis and I thought it might be interesting to see how they do that sort of thing in this old town. Come along with us, eh?"

The young man shook his head.

"I don't believe it would interest me much," he said quietly. "I've had a strenuous day, and I think I'll turn in early."

But the other men were not to be put off so easily. Garner had admitted that he had no engagement, so there was no reason in the world why he should not join them. Lundy presently divulged the real cause of their urgency. He admitted that they were a little dubious about the project, and that they wanted the companionship of one of their own kind.

"It might need just about three of us to handle the situation," he urged.

When the matter was presented in that way, young Garner felt that he could hardly refuse. He was in no special mood for an adventure of that type, but, after all, it might be interesting to see another aspect of New York life. So the upshot of the matter was that half an hour later the three men were being driven in a taxi along Forty-second Street toward Third Avenue, and then northward by what seemed a somewhat circuitous route into unknown territory, bound for a destination known only to the driver.

Presently the taxi drew up at the side entrance of a big building near the corner of an avenue in a street that might have been in the East Fifties or the West Nineties for all that the Westerners knew. The driver preceded them into the hall and touched the button of the single elevator at the left of the entrance. He whispered something to the elevator-boy, accepted with a grin the ten-dollar bill that Lundy handed him and went his way.

When the elevator stopped, the operator

got out ahead of them and showed the way along a rather dark hall. He tapped lightly on a door, which was presently opened by a man of short and robust figure.

"Some gentlemen to see Mr. Johnson," the elevator-boy announced.

"Mr. Smith, of Arizona, and two friends," Lundy explained in a low voice. As he spoke, he slipped a bill into the expectant hand of the elevator-boy. A moment later, the three men were being shown along an interior hall. A doorway toward which they were going appeared to lead into a room that was somewhat less dimly lighted.

As they entered this room, a stockily built man in evening dress came forward.

"Ah, Mr. Smith!" he said. "I have heard of you through one of my Wall Street friends. Very glad indeed to meet you. And you also," he added, extending a hand in turn to each of the others.

"Two good friends of mine, Wilson and Jenkins, all from Arizona," explained Lundy.

"Right this way!" said the host. "You are just in time for a cocktail. Half a dozen other friends of mine." He waved a hand by way of introduction. "Glad to have you join us."

GLANCING about the large, square room, young Garner saw that it was furnished in luxurious simplicity. Evidently their host was a man of taste. There were heavy draperies at doors and windows. The rich-hued Oriental rugs and the tapestry on one of the walls had "cost money," as Lundy would have expressed it. The furniture in the room consisted only of the sideboard about which the guests were grouped at the moment, a divan over at one corner, and perhaps a dozen chairs of various types—all of mahogany—and several of the chairs had padded-leather upholstery.

There was no table of any kind, but this deficiency was explained presently when the host, after questioning his guests with apparent candor as to their preferences, agreed that the evening's entertainment should be carried out with the aid of a roulette wheel.

"It is quite a fad now in New York," he explained, particularly among us Wall Street fellows, to have little portable wheels to amuse our friends with." He had touched the bell as he spoke, and a few moments later two Japanese servants were bringing in what looked like an ordinary folding card-table from an adjoining room. Unfolded, this appeared as a baize-topped table, with six slender legs to give it stability, differing apparently in nowise from an ordinary card-table except in size and in the fact that it bore markings familiar to one who had visited Monte Carlo or any of the half-hundred European resorts where roulette wheels were in vogue.

A moment later a portable roulette wheel was brought into the room by one of the Japanese servants and placed on the table.

The slender legs of the table rested on the parquet floor in the center of the room, where there was no rug.

"Anyhow, it appears to be a square game," commented Lundy in an undertone to one of his companions.

"No roulette wheel is square," objected Curtis, also in an undertone.

They had turned from the sideboard, and their host was speaking:

"Just a gentleman's game," he said. "If any one wants to be banker, say the word." He paused expectantly. As no one responded, he continued: "Or I will be banker if you wish, just as a matter of hospitality. It is anybody's game." He took a roll of bills from his pocket as he was speaking. "I happen to have ten thousand dollars here," he said, running over the bills casually. He smiled a little and shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, I have a check-book handy," he added, "if more is needed. But suppose we call the bank ten thousand, and if I go broke, some one else can take a turn."

"What about the limit?" asked Lundy.

Mr. Johnson again shrugged his shoulders amiably.

"Just whatever you like," he said, with a wave of the hand. "Personally, I don't see much fun in a game with a limit. It's like saying that you can only buy a thousand shares of stock down in the Street. When I play, I want to have a chance to get my money back, and I concede the same to every one else. Let the sky be the limit, up to the breaking-point of the bank, is our usual motto. Does that suit everybody?"

Apparently it did, and all gathered about the table, ready for action. But the host made no move toward the wheel. He made an urbane gesture and said:

"Some one of you run the thing, or take turns running it. I'll amuse myself watching or take a hand at the game with the rest of you."

"Fair enough," said Lundy. "I will whirl the thing for a little while, and if I can't make it work to suit me, I'll turn the job over to some one else. Make your bets. Round she goes!"

ABOUT three hours later it began to be evident that at least some of the players were losing interest in the game. Play had proceeded intermittently, with occasional stops for drinks. The play, for the most part, had been conservative, and there had been no very spectacular winnings or losings except that once Lundy had backed the right number, playing *en plein*, with a hundred-dollar bill, drawing thirty-five hundred dollars from the bank.

"A couple of more guesses like that and the bank is broke," laughed the host, as he laid four crisp bills before the winner.

But of course the thing did not happen "a couple of times more," and it was not long before the money had found its way back to the bank. By about midnight Lundy had taken the last bill from his purse and had seen it vanish in the wake of its companions. He laughed heartily.

"Just about the luck I usually have at this game," he commented. "Now, suppose we wind up in the way I usually do, just to make a strong finish."

The smiling host bowed.

"Whatever you say goes," he declared.

"Well, what is the bank worth by this time—if it's a fair question?" asked Lundy.

"Of course it's a fair question. Let me see." The host was at the head of the table and was running over the bills. He laughed. "Funny thing," he said. "We are just about breaking even. We started with ten thousand, and the bunch here doesn't vary from that by more than a hundred or two. The bank has just been a medium for distribution of money—as a bank should be."

Lundy had reached his hand inside his vest and was apparently pulling an envelope from a pocket there.

"All right," he said. "What do you say to letting the bank either double its money or go broke at a single whoop? I happen to have two notes here that together just match the bank. Here they are—each for five thousand, you see. I put them on the red. Is it a go?"

Mr. Johnson's face did not change expression.

"Why not?" he commented.

He took up the pile of bills of various denominations with a sweep of the hand and, without recounting it, placed it on the black diamond.

"There you are!" he laughed. "Somebody spin the wheel."

He paused a moment, and, as no one made a move, he gestured toward Lundy.

"Spin it yourself, Mr. Smith," he suggested.

Lundy rose and put his hand to the wheel.

"I didn't have much luck spinning earlier in the evening," he said. "But I don't know as it makes much difference who does the whirling. Here's luck to the lucky man!"

The wheel went noiselessly about, and then the little ball made its rat-tat-tat while every eye watched Lundy. The wheel slowed down gradually; the ball made feebler and feebler leaps from pocket to pocket, and then oscillated for a moment and settled finally to rest—against a black shaft.

Lundy laughed heartily and threw out a hand in the direction of the host, who was standing with folded arms, apparently little interested in the result.

"Congratulations!" cried the Arizonian.

"The fortunes of war. Better luck for you another time," said the other blandly.

A few minutes later, after a drink all round at the sideboard, the company prepared to disperse.

"Come right through this way to get your things," the affable host suggested, leading the way through a door on the opposite side of the room from that from which the table and roulette wheel had been produced earlier in the evening.

As he went through the door, he switched on a light, revealing a handsomely furnished room with twin beds.

"The folks are away," the amiable host explained. "Which tells you why this was a stag party," he added, with a note almost of apology. He paused in the middle of the room and moved his hand a little in the direction of the mantel.

"On another occasion, I hope to have you meet my wife," he said.

All eyes followed the gesture, and most eyes lingered more than a moment on the indicated photograph, mounted in a silver frame, which showed the face of a young woman—a face of exquisite delicacy.

Lundy chanced to be walking beside young Garner. He nudged his companion.

"Gee, Mark, look at that!" he whispered. The admonition was needless. Garner was looking. He was staring. He was also gasping for breath.

He was conscious presently that his host was at his side and that a voice was saying,

"I infer that you approve my taste in women."

For some moments Garner was inarticulate. Then he managed to gasp,

"Do you mean tc say that this—is a picture—of—of your wife?"

Mr. Johnson was smiling blandly.

"I did not quite say that," he corrected. "Or, at least, if I did intimate it, I don't mind telling you that I did not speak quite with technical accuracy." He winked confidentially and shrugged his shoulders. "But, when I tell you that the lady in person is even more lovely than her picture, I think you will hardly blame me."

He had turned away as he spoke, and, still laughing a little, followed his guests into the room beyond.

For several moments—he himself could not have said how long—Marcus Garner stood there staring vacantly at the photograph, dazed, stunned. Then he was conscious that Lundy was calling to him, and he found himself, with the others, in the room beyond the bedroom. A small, dark man was holding his coat for him. He vaguely recognized the face as that of a Japanese. Then he started, and looked intently at the face.

Good God! It was the face of the servant who had taken his coat last when he came to call on Mary Alden. In this light there was no mistaking it. He had noted a resemblance earlier, but had dismissed it with the reflection that "all Japs look alike."

Garner with difficulty restrained the impulse to swing his fist against that face. But, after all, this servant had no responsibility for his discomfiture. He put his hands into his pockets.

A moment later he was aware that the urbane host was extending a hand by way of parting salutation. He found his own hand doubling into a fist in his pocket. And now it was with genuine difficulty that he restrained himself. He had just sanity enough left to reflect that he had no authorization to act as champion—that no acknowledged right or privilege of his had been invaded.

He took his hand from his pocket and allowed it to touch the extended hand of the man against whom his whole being was turbulent with hatred. But he avoided looking at the man lest he should be unable to restrain himself.

He turned quickly toward the door, with eyes averted; but he was fully conscious now that this was the very room in which Mary Alden had greeted him the night before.

He went along the hall, through the door, to the group of elevators at the left, still in a trance. But he roused sufficiently to note at the other end of the corridor the single elevator and the rear door of the apartment—where they had entered a few hours before.

AT THE ground floor they were ushered out through a different corridor from that at which they had entered. Garner was vividly conscious that this was the hall through which he had passed twice before—when he had come to see Mary Alden, and when they were going out, bound for the theatre. He noticed the desk of the telephone-operator, now deserted, over there at the right. This landmark had not been visible from the side entrance through which they had come the present evening. He stepped automatically into one of the taxis that appeared to be waiting for their party, and they were driven, by what he vaguely recognized as a roundabout way, to the hotel. He parted from his companions at the elevator door.

"Good-night," he heard them say in chorus, and Lundy added: "Much obliged to you for coming. Sorry there wasn't anything more exciting to show you. Better luck next time."

Anything more exciting! Good God! Anthing more exciting! He kept repeating the phrase inanely after he had gone to his room. He stood staring into the mirror.

"Good God!" he said aloud, and marveled at the quietness of his own voice. "Good God! What a poker face! Apparently Lundy and Curtis did not realize that anything had happened to me." He drew a deep breath and his jaw set tighter.

"Well, after all, what has happened?" And the laugh with which he answered his own question was strident, sardonic—the laugh of a man who feels himself hard hit.

THE NEXT morning Mark Garner found himself confronted with the greatest dilemma of his career. Young though he was, he had lived a very active fifteen years or so and had found himself, first and last, in a good many puzzling situations. But nothing like this.

His first thought was that he would take an early train out of town and never come back. He would send no word whatever to Mary Alden. Certainly he never wished to see her again.

But even as he said this to himself, he knew that what he said was not true. He did wish to see Mary Alden again. Indeed, to see her was the one all-compassing wish that was in his mind. What he had learned the night before had turned his whole mental world upside down. He could never have faith in any human being again. But even as he said this, he realized that confidence and love are not synonymous words. Love may remain when faith is shattered. Facing the matter squarely, he knew that his affection for Mary Alden had not abated one jot, even though she now appeared to be a totally different person from the one he had thought he loved.

At any rate he must see her, must talk with her, must hear what she had to say. She had promised him that they should have the evening by themselves. He would keep the engagement and let matters develop as they would.

So he filled the hours some way—any way—till evening; and at seven o'clock he found himself for the third time at the door of the apartment where Mary Alden lived.

She was alone in the drawing-room when he was shown in; and she came forward to greet him with the same welcoming smile, the same cordial hand-clasp with which she had met him on that other occasion. But now he seemed to see standing round her a group of men, and in particular one man with rotund body, gross face bald head, a disagreeable mouth with leering smile.

But his own face was apparently as immobile as it had been the night before, for the girl who now greeted him appeared to find nothing strange in his appearance—for a moment, at any rate. Then the quick intuition that is a woman's birthright appeared to warn her that something was wrong.

The big, appealing eyes looked up into his searchingly. In a tone vibrant with sympathy, she said:

"Has something happened since I saw you? Have you had bad news about something?"

He settled into a chair. She stood beside him. For a few moments his eyes were turned away. Then he looked up at her and clenched his hands, and, with supreme effort, said,

"Yes; something has happened."

She gasped a little.

"Oh, I was afraid so," she murmured. "Tell me about it."

"It is nothing that I wish to tell," he said very quietly. "And instead of telling you about it, I am going to tell you something else."

He was on his feet now, speaking with sudden resolution. He turned toward the girl and caught both her hands in his.

"I am going to tell you that I love you and that I want you to marry me at once," he said in a low, tense voice. Then as she looked up at him and gasped with surprise, he went on: "It does not matter to me who you are or what you have done. I love you and I cannot get along without you. I want to take you away at once."

The girl slowly withdrew her hands and stepped back a little. Her face was full of wonderment.

"But, Mr. Garner—Mark—I do not understand!" she gasped. "I do not mean that I did not know—or think—that you cared for me. I did know. I expected that you would ask me to marry you." She hesitated, faltered, averted her eyes, then looked up quickly. "And I intended to say that I would marry you. But the strange way in which you speak—your strange manner—I do not understand."

The young man made a half-articulate sound—between a groan and an oath.

"Perhaps it will help you to understand," he said slowly, "if I tell you just what I did last night." Then he told her in brief, emphatic sentences, all that had happened.

He condensed the narrative to its essentials, but he left nothing out—even the matter of her photograph, there on the mantel.

And she stood there before him speechless, wide-eyed, never looking away from his face, and her own was a picture of astonishment, at first of bewilderment, later of amazement tempered with partial understanding.

When he had done, she still stood silent, immobile, seemingly lifeless, for some moments. Then she stepped quickly forward and laid her hands on his arm.

"Oh, Mark," she said, "you don't know, you can't know how very wonderful you are! That you still should have come to me after all that—after seeing such things, and having reason to think what you did think and what you do think! It is wonderful! But, oh, my dear, things are not at all as you suppose. What you have told me is the most amazing revelation. You have made me understand matters that I did not understand at all before. I will not try to explain just yet. But let me tell you at once that I have never even seen, much less spoken to or known the man you tell about." Her cheeks were flaming now, but she went on without faltering. "Nor any other man who could say or intimate such things as this man said or intimated. Strange as it must seem to you, I can tell you truthfully that your entire story is a revelation of things that I never dreamed of." She hesitated for a moment, then added earnestly, "We will talk it all over presently, but I could not wait a moment to tell you that—that——"

Her voice trailed away; her eyes were now averted. She was all in a tremble. Then his arms were about her, and he was caressing her hair with his lips and murmuring apologies and asking forgiveness; and for the second time that day his world was quite made over, and this time it was made into Elysium.

ON THE following Tuesday evening, at about ten o'clock, Marcus Garner found himself, together with his Western friends, Curtis and Lundy, again in the room where the roulette wheel had been operated on that, for him, memorable evening a week before.

The alleged Mr. Johnson, their host, was precisely the same in appearance, manner, and urbanity of mood as on the other occasion. He had greeted the three Westerners cordially, in particular addressing Lundy.

"You have come for your revenge, as you promised, eh? Well, you are very welcome, and I hope luck will run your way to-night."

Garner noticed that two of the men in the room had been among the guests of the previous evening. The remaining half-dozen or so were newcomers. As on the former occasion, the various guests were introduced to one another with an informal gesture, and for the most part without being named. Probably no one there was so unsophisticated as not to understand that when names were used they were likely to be fictitious.

Accustomed as he was to size men up at a glance, Lundy looked the company over and found only one member as to whose status he felt in doubt. This was a middle-aged man of medium height, exceedingly robust of figure, with smooth face graven with lines that mark the man of character, and a notable shock of iron-gray hair that had the appearance of having been combed with the fingers only. This man had been named as Mr. Larabee, of Ottumwa, Iowa. Lundy was puzzled whether to place him as banker, lawyer or physician; but he knew him for a man of parts, whatever his exact calling.

As the group gathered about the roulette-table, the host made the same preliminary speech that he had made on the other occasion. A gentleman's game. Any one might be the banker. Just for recreation, between friends, with no one caring much how the luck ran. He added, however, a comment addressed to Lundy.

"Mr. Smith," he said, smiling a little in apparent recognition of an understanding that the name was assumed for the occasion; "Mr. Smith, last week, if memory serves me, luck ran a little against you."

"A matter of no consequence—no consequence at all," Lundy asserted amiably.

Mr. Johnson shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course not. I understand that perfectly. None of us would be here if the loss or gain of a few thousand mattered. But, all the same, we all like to win—even if we are only matching coins for the cigars. And when a man has lost, it is only fair to give him a chance to turn the tables, just as a matter of sportsmanship. Last week the bank had only ten thousand dollars, and, if I remember rightly, you matched dollar for dollar on the last whirl of the wheel and lost. You had already lost a few thousand before that, so you must have been fifteen or twenty thousand on the wrong side of the ledger at the end of the evening. Now, to give you a chance to win that back and balance up accounts, I am banking fifty thousand to-night."

He had taken a big roll of bills from his pocket and was counting them out and laying them on the table beside the wheel.

"Up to the point of breaking the bank—or beyond it, for that matter, if you will take my check—the sky is the limit," he added casually. "Now, some one take the wheel—and we're off."

There was nothing notable to mark the playing for a time. Various members of the company took turns spinning the wheel, and Mr. Johnson, for the most part, walked about the table or stood back a little, overlooking the company with appearance of mild interest, arms folded or in his pockets.

LUNDY began with small bets, as was his custom, and for a time he mostly played what he would have described as a "baby game," covering black or red or playing odds or evens. He sometimes lost and sometimes won, and at the end of a half-hour or so he was about where he had started. He had not yet warmed to the game, but was rather amusing himself watching the play of others. In particular he had watched Larabee, the man from Iowa, noting that he appeared to take a deep interest in the game, but that, like himself, he apparently had not yet been roused to the point of what Lundy would call "man-size" play.

Presently Larabee rose from the table and strolled over to the sideboard, apparently to get a drink. Returning, he resumed his seat near the head of the table.

"Figuring out a scheme to break the bank, I take it," was Lundy's mental observation. And he added: "Well, he ought to know that the thing can't be done. However, we may as well inject a little interest into the game."

So thinking, but without vocal comment, Lundy took up a handful of bills from the pile in front of him and laid one after another on the red diamond until twenty thousand-dollar bills lay there.

Mr. Johnson, standing near the head of the table, met Lundy's eye.

"I see," he said casually, "you are planning to get back what you lost last week at a single coup. Well, here's luck to you!"

He stepped toward the wheel as he spoke, himself gave it a spin; then stood back a little, folded his arms and resumed his characteristic attitude of indifference.

A moment later he cried, with more enthusiasm than was his wont:

"Red it is! You win! Congratulations!"

He counted out the money from the pile representing the bank and passed it over to Lundy with a smile.

"Now things are warming up a bit," he said. "It begins to be interesting."

Lundy smiled placidly.

"While luck is with me," he said quietly, "I think I will break the bank. You have been running a little ahead, so I fancy you have about thirty-five thousand in your pile there. All right. I will put this thousand-dollar bill on number thirteen—and the thing is done."

To young Garner, who was watching intently—he had played off and on throughout the evening, without notable gain or loss—it seemed that the urbane host hesitated a little and that the muscles of his face tightened. Certainly there was just a suspicion of stridency in his voice as he called out:

"Fine! And again I say, good luck to you!"

All eyes were now on the wheel as it was spun by the man who chanced to be nearest to it. There were no other bets on the table. It was as if every one sensed something unusual in Lundy's wager, though there was really nothing anomalous about it. More than once before he had backed a single number to the limit—and lost, with nothing much thought about it. Doubtless it was the fact that he had just won the twenty-thousand-dollar hazard that gave interest to his present move. Pretty nearly every one who plays at a game of chance is more or less superstitious, and, superstitious or not, every one knows that luck does tend to "run in bunches."

Every one at the table also knew, of course, that the chances against the single number that Lundy had backed were thirty-seven to one. Yet every one watched the wheel with at least a vague expectancy.

And the expectations were justified; for the improbable happened, and the little ball settled finally into the pocket labeled "Thirteen." The man from Arizona had broken the bank!

If the face of Mr. Johnson had shown a certain solicitude before the wheel began its final spin, it was now a study in consternation and bewilderment.

Nevertheless, he managed a little laugh as he stepped forward and, taking up the entire pile of bills constituting the bank, pushed it along the table to the winner.

"The bank is broke, all right," he said, obviously controlling his voice with difficulty. "So it is up to you to act as banker the rest of the evening, Mr. Smith."

Lundy gathered up the money with a sweep of his hand and thrust the great wad of it into his pockets, rising as he did so. He did not step toward the head of the table, however. But another man did—a tall, slender, atheltic young man, Mark Garner by name—a young man who, if the truth were known, had been waiting this moment throughout the evening with eager, even if well-disguised impatience. The alacrity with which he came forward now suggested the release of a coiled spring. The scowl on his face matched or outmatched that of the face of the man he confronted. The words that he uttered must have come to the ears of that man like a thunderclap from a clear sky.

"The rest of the evening will be spent in a quite different way, you blackguard!' said the low, menacing voice.

As Garner spoke, he thrust his left hand quickly forward and brought his open palm against the other's cheek. .

"Blackguard," he repeated, "and crooked gambler, put up your hands; you are in for the beating of your despicable life!"

The gambler's rubicund face blanched. His eyes were staring; his lips moved inarticulately. He backed away from the young man whose partly raised fist menaced him. But, as he did so, his right hand went toward his hip-pocket.

Garner had waited for his antagonist to put up his hands. The instinct of the fair fighter dominated even his rage. Now his eye caught that hipward movement, and he waited no longer. Quick as a cat, he lunged forward. His left fist came in with a little hook to the gambler's waist; his right swung to the jaw; the gambler's head went back with a snap, and his whole body lurched backward, crashing against the table, sending wheel and table to the floor in a mass of wreckage, amid which lay the helpless figure of the gambler himself, a partly drawn pistol in his now inert hand.

ABOUT half a minute later Mr. Johnson was on his feet, a very abject and bewildered figure. He had been aided in no gentle manner by an officer in plain clothes at either elbow. Another officer, Detective McFalcom, was now standing before him, holding the pistol and remarking casually:

"Well, we've got you right this time, Lowry. You will get seven years up in Sing Sing for carrying this gun, without bothering about your other crookedness. You led us quite a chase, but you're at the end of the trail."

Meantime, Mr. Larabee, of Iowa, had lifted the shattered roulette wheel to one side and was now stooping over and examining it with obvious interest. He nodded his head approvingly.

"Nice piece of work," he said reflectively.

Lundy and two or three others, seeing that the excitement was over, turned toward the "man from Iowa" and asked him what it was about the wheel that interested him. Also, the guests were asking one another what the whole fracas was about. That is to say, all but two of them were. The two exceptions had made a rapid move toward one of the doors at the moment when young Garner had so unexpectedly erupted. The two would-be absentees did not reach the door, however. They found themselves confronted by a man who had turned back the lapel of his coat a little, showed a shield and advised them to submit quietly. They saw the force of the argument and submitted. They were removed to the hallway in the custody of the detectives, along with their chief, to await the pleasure of the assistant district attorney, Webster, who at the moment was having the beauties of the roulette wheel, as regards its inner mechanism, demonstrated to him by "Mr. Larabee."

Webster turned presently to Lundy and his associates and, waving his hand toward "Mr. Larabee, of Iowa," said:

"Gentlemen, this is Dr. Goodrich, New York's most distinguished medical examiner. I fancy you have all heard of him. He has been doing a neat piece of work here that is just a little out of his ordinary line." He turned to the physician. "Tell us about it, Doctor," he suggested.

Dr. Goodrich put a finger against the broken roulette wheel, indicating a series of wires which ran parallel to form a wheel just within the original framework.

"A neat piece of work," he said, "though relatively simple. This coil of wire acts as an antenna, and inside you can see some mechanism that really consists of a series of small electron tubes—the newest modification of the De Forest tube, sometimes callde the audion. In a word, it is just a condensed receiving wireless apparatus. It caught a wireless signal, and operated a clutch that made the roulette wheel stop at just the right moment. It is the very newest thing in crooked gambling-wheels."

"But how in the world was it operated?" Lundy inquired. "I have seen crooked wheels worked with an ordinary electric button," he added, "but this wireless wheel is a new one on me."

"It is a new one on any one, for that matter," explained the physician. "But it is very simple—that is, so far as you can say that any wireless mechanism is simple. In this case, only a very feeble sending apparatus was required, for it is located in a little workroom at the rear of this apartment, with the sending antenna strung outside the window. It could be operated from this room by sending the signal along a wire that runs under the floor—a wire originally intended as a means of signaling from the dining-room to the kitchen."

As he spoke, the physician was turning back the handsome Oriental rug that lay along the floor.

"Here you see the mechanism," he said. "There is an induction-coil adjusted under the rug, as you see—or, rather, a pair of coils, one at either side, about three feet from where the table was placed. Standing over either of these coils, the operator—our genial host—could send the signal by pressing with arm or hand the little apparatus adjusted under his clothing or in his pocket. It is practically just a case of pushing a button. You gentlemen saw for yourselves how well it worked last week"—an amused expression overspread the physician's face—"and how it failed to work to-night."

"But why did it fail to work to-night?" asked Lundy eagerly.

"Well, to be quite accurate, it didn't exactly fail," he said. "Only, it didn't work the way our host expected it would. The reason was that I had been in here earlier in the day and tampered with his apparatus. When our friend Garner there found out that something was wrong last week, he got in touch with the district-attorney's office, and they put me on the job. Mrs. Courtney, who leases this apartment, and her niece, Miss Alden, who lives with her, were totally ignorant of the use their subtenant made of these rooms back here. I will tell you a little more about that part of the game in a moment. That also concerns a new method in scientific gambling, but from a different point of view. To explain this wireless part of the project, let me tell you that I simply fixed the two induction apparatuses here under the rug so that I could cut one of them out of the circuit by touching a button that I arranged in back of the sideboard. Some of you may have noticed that I stepped over there, ostensibly to get a drink, at about the time when the game began to be interesting. If so, you will recall that I then came back and stood on the rug here near the head of the table—on the opposite side from where our host was standing."

THE physician's smile had broadened. Lundy, beginning to see the point of the joke, clapped his hand against his thigh and laughed heartily.

"I knew you were the goods, Doc!" he cried. "I knew it as soon as I set eyes on you. And I noticed you standing over there looking wise as an owl. But I thought you were figuring out a way to beat the game."

"I was standing there in order to beat the game," said the physician. "But the figuring had all been done in advance, as you know from what I have just told you. I judged from the gleam in your eye that you were about to make a reckless move, and so I got on the job and prepared to work the wireless and help you break the bank."

Lundy put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a mass of bills.

"Great stuff, Doc!" he cried. "We split the loot fifty-fifty."

Dr. Goodrich laughed and waved his hand in disapproval.

"No, that would be demoralizing an

officer of the law," he said. "I am paid from the city treasury. But you might return their losings to these other fellows, who supposed, as you did, that they were playing a gentleman's game against an honest wheel."

"I sure will do that with pleasure!" cried Lundy heartily. "I'll do better than that. We will just divide the loot among us evenly, and if you won't take any of it, Doc, we will chip in and buy you a gold watch or something for a souvenir."

"Let it be a box of cigars; that is about the limit," said the physician, amused at the hearty enthusiasm of the Westerner. "Incidentally," he added, "it will be well to say little to any one about what has happened here to-night. By special exercise of his prerogatives, Webster can handle this case without publicity. In order to shield innocent people, he is glad to do so. But his task would be needlessly complicated if gossip about the affair were to leak out."

"Mum's the word," said Lundy.

Webster had gone to give directions about the prisoners out in the hall, and Mark Garner, who appeared to have taken on himself the responsibility of host, had also disappeared, remarking that he would get the overcoats for the remaining guests. Dr. Goodrich was still looking into the interior of the roulette wheel, apparently studying the technicalities of its mechanism.

"Doc, you were going to tell us about another new feature of the gambling-game," Lundy reminded him.

"So I was," the physician assented. "It is also very simple, but curiously effective, and I am bound to say it required a certain inventive genius to devise the plan, whoever did it. The method is simply for the ambitious gambler to get in touch through a letter of introduction or through a rental agency with some woman of unequivocal social standing, preferably a widow, who has a high-grade apartment in a good quarter of the city, but who is not in affluent circumstances. The story told her is that a rich man who lives in the suburbs wishes to have quarters in a private dwelling, to which he can come once a week to spend the night and to entertain some of his men friends who like to get together to play whist or chess. The understanding is that the apartment is to be vacated on these nights. Assurance is given that no woman or objectionable persons will under any circumstances be present. It is merely the meeting-place for a gentlemen's club, where late hours will be kept, and where there may be a certain amount of harmless hilarity. Naturally, the subtenant pays liberally."

"Sounds kind of fishy to me," said Lundy.

"So it doubtless would to almost any sophisticated person. But perhaps less so to a New Yorker than to an outsider," said Dr. Goodrich, "for the reason that we are so accustomed to all manner of bizarre things. Anyhow, fishy or not, the thing actually works. They call it the 'switch-house plan.' You see, the same operator has seven rooms like this in different parts of town—one for each evening of the week. This one would be known as 'Tuesday House.' It is a recognized method of conducting gambling-rooms in New York city to-day, and one of the most difficult for the authorities to circumvent—for reasons that you will readily apprehend from what you have seen here. In the present case, we have to thank young Garner for putting us wise; and he has to thank the young lady whose aunt leases this apartment and the aunt herself—these women having been, perhaps, the two most astonished people in the entire metropolis when they found out how they had been hoodwinked."

AT THAT moment Marcus Garner returned, bearing an armful of overcoats.

"Before this party breaks up," he announced, "I want to mention that the next gathering in this apartment will be for an informal but very important wedding, which is to take place to-morrow morning at eleven-thirty. You are all invited. Dr. Goodrich has already promised to attend," he added.

"In point of fact," said the physician, "I am to have the honor of acting as best man."

"Bully for you, Doc!" cried Lundy. "They couldn't find a better man for that or any other job." He was slapping the physician's broad shoulders with friendly enthusiasm. "I knew you were the goods when I first laid eyes on you," was his parting comment.

A strange situation, whose mystery is solved by Dr. Goodrich's great knowledge of science and human nature, is related in "The First Stone," to appear in March Everybody's—out February 15th.

A Complete Novel

Stop the Press!

Reforming a Town—That's a Big Job for a Newspaper Editor, Even if He Is Aided by a Pretty Girl. But They Did It

By Oliver Peck Newman

Illustrations by Douglas Duer

MISS SUSAN GREGG, one of the faintest but most indispensable rays shed upon Prairie City by that brilliant orb, the *Evening Sun*, sat near the railing of the balcony rest-room overlooking the busy main floor of the Greater Stanberry Stores—"the biggest and best between Chicago and San Francisco"—waiting for the proud proprietor of that modern establishment to tell her all the things he wanted to have published about his annual fall opening.

Milton K. Stanberry liked to keep a close eye and a firm hand on every department of his business, so he lodged his private office on the balcony instead of on the top floor, as is the rule in most department stores. Miss Gregg therefore waited patiently on the balcony, and being an industrious young woman with a consciousness of the flight of time, made herself comfortable at one of the desks provided for women patrons and diligently began turning into copy material she had already gathered for the next day's paper.

Her industry was broken into by another ray from the *Sun*—not a feeble one, this, but a ray with bright, sparkling eyes, a confident, disarming smile and the springy step of youth and confidence. When it came to soliciting tough prospects for advertising in the paper, the men in the business office claimed that Jim Austin had the nerve to "charge hell with a bucket of water."

"Hello, there!" Austin chirped. "Why this industry?"

"Hello, Jim!" said Miss Gregg. "I should think you'd know. I'm doing the usual, awful early-fall job, getting a story about the Stanberry opening."

"Well," said Austin, with a grin, "you've got something on me at that. He'll be glad to see you; he'll kick me out. Have you seen the noon edition?"

"No. Why?"

"Nothing; nothing at all—only, Cooley's blown Stanberry higher than a kite. He'll be in a fine large state of mind when I tackle him for copy for his ad for tomorrow."

"Has Cooley been roasting him about his clerks' union?"

"Yes," replied Austin, with his hand on the knob of the door to the merchant's private office. "If I come out of here in pieces, please gather up the fragments and send them home to mother."

"With pleasure," Miss Gregg responded, and turned as her attention was attracted by the excited voice of Milton K. Stanberry himself, who had just appeared at the top of the short flight of stairs leading from the main floor and had encountered one of his salesgirls hurrying in the other direction.

"So you're going to run my store for me, are you?" he demanded of the young woman, Miss Beulah Crawford, at the same time waving a crumpled copy of the Prairie City *Sun* in her face, "and you're going to strike unless you get more wages and shorter hours, eh? And you've got a champion in that fool editor, Cooley, have you?"

The young lady backed away.

"We'll see about that!" roared Stanberry. "I don't want a word of union out of a single man or woman in the Stanberry Stores; understand that?"

"Yes, sir," meekly replied Beulah.

"The first person who says 'wages,' or 'hours' to me, goes! Don't forget that."

"Yes, sir."

"Now get to work!"

"Very well, sir," murmured the apparently frightened girl, and scurried down-stairs.

WITHOUT observing Miss Gregg, Stanberry strode toward his office, head bent and muttering, and bumped squarely into Jim Austin just as that energetic young advertising solicitor stepped through the door of the private office into the rest-room.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Stanberry," said Austin. "How about copy on that page ad for to-morrow?"

"How about it? How about it? I should think you would ask how about it!"

"You seem to have something on your mind," Austin observed, with the smile that was sometimes disarming.

Stanberry shook the crumpled *Sun* in the young man's face.

"You've certainly got your nerve to come up here and ask me for copy on a page ad after printing that!" he declared. "What do you mean by saying my clerks are going to strike, when I'm giving you page and double-page ads?" He threw the *Sun* on the floor and stamped on it. "Of all the despicable, contemptible, ungrateful sheets, that's the worst!"

"What the clerks' union does is news, Mr. Stanberry," argued Austin. "The people want to know about it, and we have to tell 'em." This was oil on the flame.

"There you go on one of those fool theories!" cried the merchant. "Ever since Alice Dutton hired that young Cooley to run the *Sun*, things have been upside down in this town."

"It's the first time the town ever had a paper run in the interest of the public," explained Austin.

Stanberry shook his fist in Austin's face.

"Well, I want to tell you one thing, young man," he said, "and I want you to remember it. Henry Cooley can't roast the Stanberry Stores and get away with it. My ad comes out of that paper to-day—and it stays out!" He started for his office. At the door he paused and said, "Another thing: I don't want you coming up here soliciting me, either." And the emphasis with which he slammed his door indicated that he meant it.

Susan Gregg, who seldom took anything seriously, greeted Austin with laughing eyes as he turned back from the shut door.

"Never mind, Jim; I still love you."

With a discouraged gesture, Austin turned to her.

"If you only did, I could stand old Skinflint," he said. "Won't you ever be serious?"

"It's because I'm so dead serious that I won't, Jim," replied Miss Gregg.

Austin gazed about the big store and waved his arm.

"I'd love to turn you loose up here," he said. "I'd dress you like a queen."

Level-headed Susan Gregg chuckled.

"That's what you think now, but dressing your wife like a queen and writing checks to pay the bills are two of the cutest little home-wreckers we have in our midst."

"I'm willing to gamble on it," Austin declared.

"But I'm not," emphatically replied the young lady. "I like a sure thing—even if it's society reporting and writing fall openings."

"I hate to have you doing such things."

"They're no harder than soliciting people like old Stanberry for advertising."

"Oh, I'll get him," said Austin, with returning confidence, "after he's cooled off."

"Seriously, Jim, Cooley has got all our influential citizens after him and the *Sun*, hasn't he?" asked Miss Gregg.

"Of course he has," Austin answered. "Cooley is running a readers' newspaper. Instead of toning down his stuff to suit the advertiser or other persons specially interested, he's printing what he believes the public is entitled to know, and advocating the things that make for the public good."

"I understand that," said Miss Gregg, "and I realize that every once in a while some big advertiser, politician or banker, like Stanberry, gets his toes trampled on."

"He does," affirmed Austin, "and, of course, he hollers, but after a while he'll get wise."

"But if we keep on losing advertising the way we've been losing it for the past year," said Susan, "we'll have to suspend publication."

"Don't you worry; Cooley knows what he's about," said Austin.

"Well, I don't see where he's going to get off."

"Of course you don't," Austin agreed; "but when the advertisers find they can't control the paper, they'll quit trying."

"And in the mean time," observed the young woman, "we're likely to go under."

THE philosophy of that observation received considerable support from the rapidly occurring events of the next fifteen minutes, which caught Austin and Miss Gregg in their turmoil and held them, interested if unwitting witnesses to their drama. As they reached the head of the stairs in a desire to put a reasonable lapse of time between Stanberry's anger and their next visit, Austin and Miss Gregg encountered another advertiser in the person of Harvey G. Willis, proprietor of the Willis Dry Goods Company, who, like Stanberry, was armed with a crumpled copy of the *Sun*.

"Where's Stanberry?" he demanded of nobody in particular but in a tone of voice that brought his business rival promptly into the rest-room. "Have you seen the *Sun?*" he angrily cried.

"Have I seen the *Sun?*" echoed Stanberry. "I haven't seen anything but *Suns* all day."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" thundered Willis.

Stanberry's face showed surprise.

"What do *you* care what I do about it?" he asked. "Your clerks haven't struck."

"No," Willis replied. "I've met their demands. I'm a believer in Labor; but have you read what that dirty sheet says about me? Listen to this!" commanded Willis, reading from his *Sun*. " 'Put up or shut up. Inspectors serve notice on Willis Dry Goods Company. Fire-escapeless buildings may be closed.' That's the heading——"

"The infamous scoundrels!" muttered Stanberry.

"And I'm their biggest advertiser, next to you," Willis declared. "Do you suppose I'm going to give my advertising to a newspaper that prints things like that about my store? Newspapers ought to protect their advertisers."

"It's the universal custom, but this Cooley says he can't follow it because he must serve his readers," moaned Stanberry.

At this point, the convention of *Sun* readers was augmented by two new arrivals, each also bearing a more or less mutilated copy of the noon edition, each moved to wrath, and each attracted for the same reason to Milton K. Stanberry, who, being the heaviest advertiser, was naturally presumed to wield the heaviest club whenever it seemed necessary to tame a fractious editor.

"How much longer are we going to stand this?" demanded Judson J. Peters, the more hot-headed of the two newcomers.

"Stand what?" asked Stanberry, to whom surprises were coming a bit fast.

"This sensational, yellow journalism," Peters responded. "What are you going to do about it?"

The second newcomer, Phil Perkins, a heavy-set man, calmest when maddest, laconic always, put the case in the language of his profession.

"It's your ante, Milt; are you in?"

"What have they done to you?" asked Stanberry.

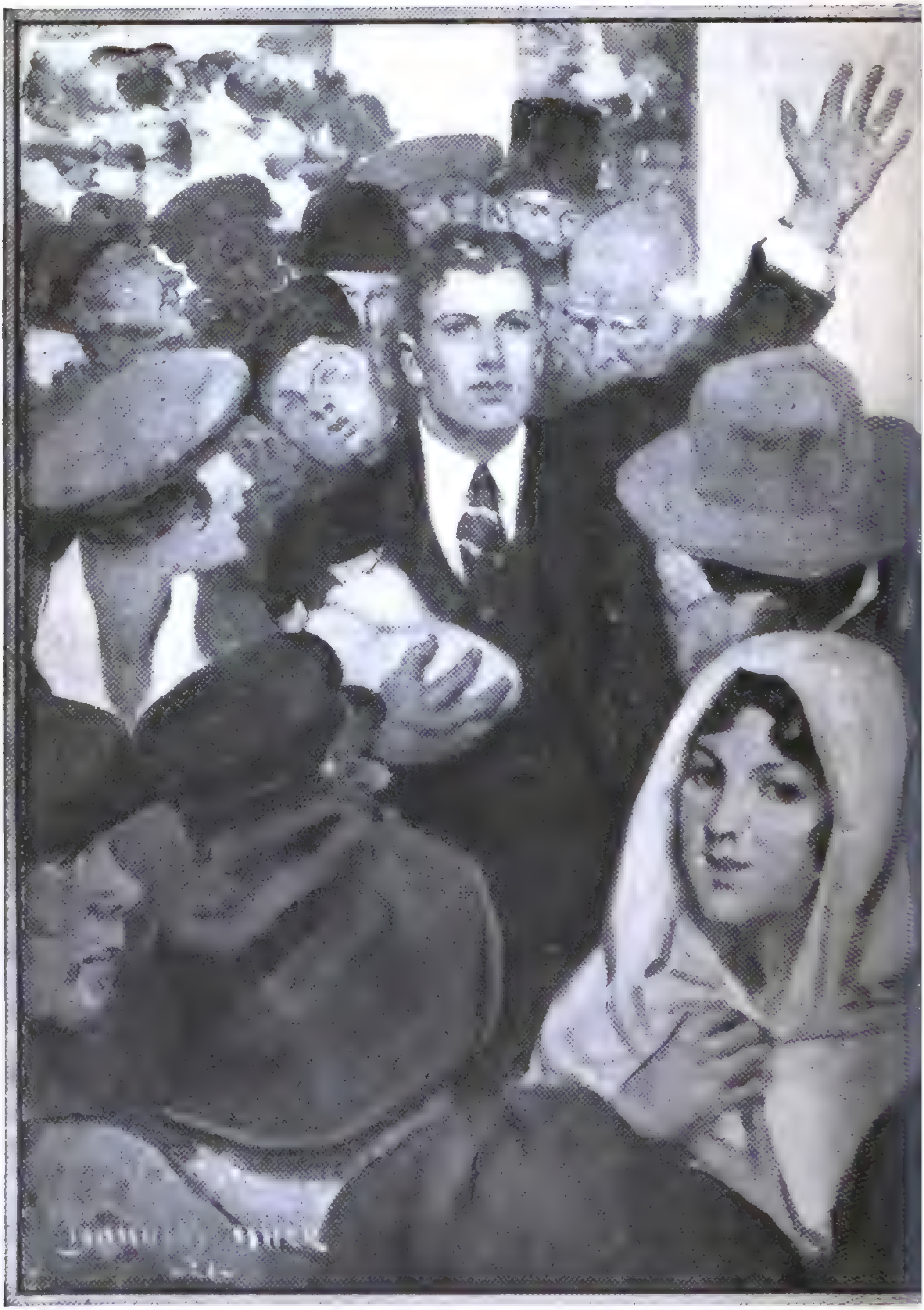
"Closed my gambling-houses up-town," quietly answered Perkins. "Ain't that enough?" He held up his *Sun* and commanded attention. "Listen to this: 'Grabs sidewalk. Work stopped on Peters' clothing-store addition. City attorney says firm is trying to steal public property.' "

Before Stanberry could express sympathy or indignation, a shuffling step and labored breathing were heard from the direction of the stairway. All turned as dignified, well-groomed, trim-whiskered Jeremiah Bowers, radiating eminent respectability, in spite of the obvious fact that he was strangely flustered from hurry and excitement, appeared.

"Ah, Milton, I'm glad to find you," he panted, "and I'm delighted that the rest of you happen to be here." He held up a copy of the *Sun*. "Have you seen this terrible outrage? Listen! 'City-deposit graft. Mayor demands interest on municipal funds. Prairie City National Bank will lose account unless it agrees to pay three per cent.' "

To the minds of the guardians of the city's prosperity there assembled this was the crowning outrage.

"Infamous!" thundered Stanberry.



"Yes, dear friends," said Cooley; "a wagon-load of money! I made the rounds

the banks and here I am. Anybody who wants his money step right up and get it."

Bowers wrung his hands in anguish.

"After all the care with which I have looked after the city's deposits!" he said. "Ah, gentlemen, surely the prophet is not without honor save in his own country."

By this time the convention needed only one more delegate to make its attendance complete and its sentiment unanimous, and this want was at that moment filled when the erect, businesslike, short-spoken Theodore W. Walker strode rapidly through the group.

"It's time you fellows got together," he declared, halting in front of Stanberry and holding up a copy of the *Sun*. "Have you read this? Did you ever see anything so ridiculous?"

"I never did," said Stanberry. "The very idea of a newspaper taking up this clerks' fight against me—*me*, its biggest advertiser!"

"But look here—" interrupted Walker.

"And against me," interrupted Bowers, "the guardian of the city's wealth."

"That's not what—" began Walker, turning to Bowers.

"It wants every gambling-house in the county closed," interpolated Perkins.

"And it commands *me* to put fire-escapes on my store!" cried Willis.

Walker impatiently waved Willis aside. "But that's not the worst," he said. "Listen to——"

"*I've* been enjoined from finishing my new addition," Peters put in angrily.

The pressure having been partially relieved, Walker finally got a hearing.

"That's all very well," he said; "but just listen to what it says about me and the street-car company: 'Five-cent fares to park. Movement for reduced rates to Lakeside started in city council——' "

Willis interrupted to belittle that grievance.

"That's an old story," he said: "but this fire-escape agitation is different. It——"

Lowering his paper, Walker gazed about the group with disgust.

"Don't you see the point?" he demanded. "Why, damn it, men, if this thing keeps up, *we'll actually have to reduce fares.*"

Bowers was skeptical.

"But you've always controlled the council," he remarked.

"Sure I have!" asserted Walker, with neither pride nor shame. "But since this fellow Cooley has been raising so much Cain around here, the boys are getting scared, and, besides, there's two or three honest men on the board now that I can't handle at all."

With an expression of utter disgust on his face, Peters said,

"Things have come to a pretty pass when we have to have a young simpleton like Cooley come to Prairie City and tell us how to manage our affairs!"

" 'Twas not thus in the good old days," sagely observed Bowers.

Perkins expressed himself in what was for him a long speech.

"I should say it wasn't," he said. "Why, it used to be a fellow could do something in Prairie City, but now, if you want anything, you've got to go out and get the votes of the *people*. It's a hell of a situation!"

IT WAS this moment of angry depression which the cause of it all unwittingly selected to pay a rare business call upon the head of the Stanberry Stores. Tall, supple, cheerful; young enough to be without fear of the untried and old enough to use wisdom in application of principle; pleasing in manner, patient in waiting; tolerant of the point of view of others and unswervable in following the course of right as he saw it; clean-limbed, clean-cut, straight-spoken, Henry M. Cooley, editor of the Prairie City *Sun*, rode calmly into the storm.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen," he courteously said, bowing to the group. "I hope I'm not intruding. I came to see you, Mr. Stanberry, about that new advertising contract."

Stanberry stared angrily at the man.

"New contract, eh?" he demanded. "Well, I want to see you, but not about any contract. What do you mean by printing such a despicable thing about my store?"

The others hastened to the attack.

"You say I'm robbing the public," declared Peters.

"How dare you cast suspicion upon the Prairie City National Bank?" demanded Bowers.

"How long do you think I'm going to stand this sort of thing?" was the angry query of the traction president.

"What do you know about fire-escapes?" Willis demanded. "I've run my business twenty years and never had a fire yet."

Cooley raised his hand, and although his voice was moderate, even friendly, his jaw had involuntarily advanced the barest fraction of an inch.

"One at a time, gentlemen," he said; "one at a time. Don't crowd. I'd like nothing better than a straight talk with each of you about his particular grievance."

Stanberry flared up again, declaring,

"We'll not stand this any longer!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'this,'" Cooley replied; "but if it's something the *Sun* has printed, you're dead wrong. You'll stand a lot more of it."

"Why did you publish that thing about my clerks striking?" Stanberry asked.

"Because it's news," Cooley answered.

"That's no decent way to treat an advertiser," said Willis.

"It's the decent way to treat my readers," the editor retorted, "and as for your case, Mr. Willis, that story was printed for the same reason."

"But you called me a murderer," Willis complained.

"No, I didn't," responded Cooley; "but that's what you will be in time if you persist in violating the fire-escape laws."

"No Prairie City paper ever published such things before," asserted Peters.

"That's the reason you gentlemen can't understand a newspaper's real duty to the public," said Cooley. "Do you mean to say, Mr. Peters, that, merely because you use the *Sun* as a medium for talking to the people of Prairie City, the *Sun* should sit silent and let you steal the public's property?"

"That's the whole trouble with you, Cooley," said Peters. "You're always ranting about the public, the public, the public. What do they amount to?"

"They are my master; I am serving them," Cooley quietly replied.

Stanberry again broke into the mêlée.

"Where would you be if you didn't have any advertising?" he asked.

"And what would your advertising be worth to you if the *Sun* didn't have any readers?" Cooley countered.

"I'll see you in hell before I'll reduce fares to the park!" Walker shouted.

"On the contrary," responded Cooley, "you'll reduce fares to the park and see me frequently in Prairie City. Incidentally, you'll eventually thank me for forcing the issue."

"I will, eh?"

"Certainly—because you'll make more money. There's more profit in carrying a lot of people at a low rate than a few people at a high rate."

COOLEY'S auditors, however, were in no mood to listen to philosophy. Each had been touched on his most sensitive spot—his self-interest. The tone of the attack became more menacing.

"I'll never build a fire-escape," declared Willis.

"I'm going to sue the *Sun* for fifty thousand dollars damages," threatened Stanberry, "unless you retract that infamous lie about my clerks."

Cooley turned quickly to Stanberry, thoroughly angry for the first time, but with manner and voice still calm.

"Just a moment, Mr. Stanberry," he said. "That word 'lie' is not a pleasant piece of grammar."

But Stanberry stood his ground.

"That story is absolutely without any foundation whatever," he declared.

"No, it isn't," Cooley replied. "Every word of it is true. The clerks in your store are going to strike."

"They are not, and I'll prove it," said the merchant, turning to a small group of clerks who had been interested witnesses of the latter part of the controversy, and whose presence had been tolerated because the usually hard taskmaster had been too much occupied with more serious things to send them away. "Miss Crawford," he said, addressing the salesgirl whom he had encountered a short time before and had found, as he supposed, in her usual attitude of frightened meekness, "did you hear what this man said?"

"Yes, sir," responded the young woman.

"Say it's a lie."

Meek Beulah Crawford came out of her shell.

"It's not a lie; it's the truth."

"What's that?"

Beulah walked to the center of the group.

"It's the truth, Mr. Stanberry," she said. "The Retail Clerks' Union voted last night to strike, after you turned down our demands. I gave that article to the *Sun* myself, and two o'clock, the huor set to quit, has arrived. In three minutes, two hundred and fifty-seven of your three hundred and twenty-one clerks will be on the outside looking in."

It was her first moment of emancipation, and she could not resist either her sense of importance or the dramtic setting which fate had provided for its embellishment.

"When you get enough, Mr. Stanberry," she said, with a smile for the group of startled business men, "send for me, Beulah Crawford, president of the Prairie City Retail Clerks' Union, Local Number Six fifty-three. So long!"

ON THE main floor of the store, clerks swarmed from behind the counters and could be seen taking off their aprons and sleeve-protectors, putting on their hats and gloves and making for the doors. Customers gasped with amazement, questioned them and each other, and gradually joined the exodus. On the balcony, Stanberry stood at the rail, gazing with unbelief at the scene below. Austin and Miss Gregg, who had witnessed the little drama in silence, stole quietly away, and were followed by Stanberry's business friends, sobered and bewildered. Only Cooley remained.

"Now, Mr. Stanberry," said the editor, "let's get down to brass tacks."

Stanberry looked at him curiously.

"I've a notion to kick you out," he said.

"I've a notion to stay," said Cooley.

"Haven't you done enough damage for one day?" asked Stanberry.

"That's the reason I didn't get your telepathic message to leave."

"So you stayed to apologize and try to square yourself, did you?"

"Not at all," coolly replied Cooley. "I stayed to give *you* a chance to apologize and square *yourself*."

Stanberry dropped into a chair.

"What kind of devil are you, anyway, Cooley?" he asked. "I can't make you out."

"I'm not a devil, Mr. Stanberry; I'm only an honest editor."

"A man can be honest without knifing his friends," Stanberry said.

"You're right," Cooley agreed. "In fact, he can't be honest *and* knife his friends. The only difference between you and me is on the question: 'Who are an editor's friends?' "

"His advertisers," asserted Stanberry.

"His readers," Cooley declared.

"There you go on that 'peepul' stuff again," the merchant said, with disgust.

"Well, Mr. Stanberry, the 'peepul,' whom you sneer about so disdainfully, are absolutely all there is in the world to tie to."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this," said Cooley earnestly: "Practically every newspaper in the country is run as the advertisers or others in position to turn money into the newspaper's treasury want them run. In almost every newspaper office, when a thing like this strike of yours, for instance, comes up, the editor prints what the advertiser—the employer of the people concerned—wants printed."

"Certainly," said Stanberry.

"And leaves out what the advertiser wants left out."

"Of course."

"Did it ever occur to you," Cooley asked, "that that isn't square?"

"Certainly not," Stanberry answered. "It's perfectly proper."

"No, it is not," contradicted Cooley, without heat or emphasis. "It is dishonest. In the first place, it is unfair to the employees, who are entitled to present their case and to support if they are in the right."

"Absurd!" muttered Stanberry.

"And in the second place," Cooley continued, "it is dishonest to the reader—in other words, to the people of the town where the newspaper is published. When I fail to present to the readers of my paper a fair report of what has happened in Prairie City every day, I cheat them. I've no right to let you bribe me with advertising to lie to them, directly or indirectly."

"That's all rot!" Stanberry declared. "Other newspapers don't do it; why should you?"

"Because," replied Cooley, "I know it is right, and because I am determined to do what I can to redeem the town of Prairie City from dishonest journalism and to hasten the day when the people of America can get the truth from their newspapers."

"Very noble, very noble!" said Stanberry sarcastically. "But do you want to know what *I* think about you and your Prairie City *Sun? I* think that you're going in for all this nonsense to impress that fool-girl boss of yours with your greatness, so that she'll marry you."

Cooley took a step toward him.

"Keep Miss Dutton's name out of this!"

"So I hit the mark, did I?" said Stanberry, chuckling.

"You did not!"

"You're not in love with Miss Dutton?"

"I am very grateful to Miss Dutton for believing in my newspaper ideas and for giving me the chance to put them to the test. I have explained those ideas to you in words of one syllable. If you have any intelligence at all, you grasp what they are. That's all you need to know. Understanding that, and realizing upon what basis you come into the paper, are you or are you not going to renew your contract? That's the only question between us."

"I not only refuse to renew my contract, but I'm quitting the *Sun* to-day," said Stanberry.

"You can't hurt us by that," Cooley told him. "We'll run your space blank until your present contract expires, sue you for the money and collect it."

A voice, which they both recognized and both (for different reasons) thrilled to, responded to the editor's threat. Alice Dutton, owner of the *Sun*, idol of Prairie City for her beauty, charm and graciousness, untutored in business until her father's death, a year before, had left her an orphan with the responsibility of a daily newspaper on her hands, confronted the two belligerents as suddenly as if she had been materialized by a magician.

"That will not be necessary, Mr. Cooley," she said in her usual gentle voice. "If Mr. Stanberry doesn't wish to use the columns of the *Sun*, he needn't."

"Why, Miss Alice," Stanberry exclaimed, "I didn't know you were here! I——"

"No explanations are necessary," she informed her father's old friend, with firmer voice than she had used in addressing Cooley.

"I am sorry you have been drawn into this," said Cooley. "I had hoped you need know nothing about it."

Alice Dutton looked squarely and bravely into Cooley's eyes.

"I overheard what you and he said—all of it—and I could not remain silent," she responded.

To quarrel with and speak his mind to the editor of the Prairie City *Sun* was one thing in Milton K. Stanberry's code, but to attack the beautiful young daughter of his lifelong friend was something quite different. He remembered especially his reference to her as "that fool girl," which, to do him justice, he didn't really mean, but blurted out because of his exasperation at her for employing an editor with new-fangled ideas. Therefore he now adopted a conciliatory tone.

"I'll think this over, Cooley," he said, "and see you to-morrow."

Again the young woman asserted her proprietorship of the *Sun*.

"There's nothing more to see about," she replied. "I don't want your advertising in my newspaper, Mr. Stanberry." Turning to Cooley, she said, "Will you please take me home?"

"With pleasure," the editor responded, guiding her toward the stairs.

ON THE following day, Alice Dutton visited the Prairie City National Bank, carrying in one hand a small, neatly done-up package of paper. The noon rush was over, and the spacious room was deserted, save for the bookkeepers and tellers. The head bookkeeper looked up with a smile.

Alice returned his smile and stopped at his window on her way to Bowers' office behind a low railing at the rear of the room.

"Hello, Jack!" she said.

"Hello, sis," responded a young man. He came out of his cage and joined her.

"I want to see Mr. Bowers," Miss Dutton said.

"He'll be back in a few minutes; he's out to lunch. How's Cooley and the *Sun?*"

"Flourishing," the young woman replied. "How are you?"

"Fine and dandy. Why?"

"You were pretty late getting in last night; I heard you."

"Did you? I thought I was too mousy."

She laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Where were you, Jack?" she asked.

He looked down somewhat shamefacedly and replied,

"Down at Lakeside Park."

"Playing the wheel again?" Miss Dutton asked the question with an expression of annoyance. The young man nodded.

"I wish you wouldn't do it," she said. "It's getting noised about town that you play Perkins' game pretty heavily. Everybody knows you're bookkeeper in the bank, and——"

"So that's it, is it? You're afraid I might take the bank's money——"

"Of course not!" she interrupted. "*I*

know you're straight, and *I* have no fears; but Mr. Cooley is making war on Phil Perkins' gambling-houses, and sooner or later people are going to begin talking about how the brother of the owner of the paper is one of the heaviest gamblers in town——"

Jack Dutton interrupted her.

"But I——"

"It isn't that I think it's a terrible sin for a man to gamble occasionally; everybody gambles all the time—if not at a wheel, at a card-table, in the real-estate business, in trade or something else. But the point is this: People are likely to say that I've ordered Cooley to close the gambling-houses because my brother hasn't stamina enough to stay away from them."

Dutton looked at her sheepishly.

"I never thought of that," said he.

"As a matter of fact," his sister continued, "it was Mr. Cooley's idea to close the gambling-houses because they are a bad influence for the town. I don't want the effectiveness of his campaign spoiled, as it would be if people got the idea we were fighting to save you."

Jack Dutton, who was a lovable, if pleasure-loving, boy, two years his sister's junior, who had never taken life or his responsibilities very seriously, was instantly moved to appreciation of Alice's request and sympathy with her in making it. It appealed to his sense of fair play, as well as to his great love and affection for the young woman who, since he could remember, had been both sister and mother to him.

"Don't worry about it any more," he said. "I'll cut it out."

"Thanks, Jack! I appreciate that very, very much," replied his sister.

"Don't think about it again; I'm for you—and for Cooley, too." And he started back to his cage with a grin as Bowers entered through the revolving door.

THE banker's face lighted with pleasure and his eye kindled with a mischievous twinkle when he saw Alice Dutton, of whose modern ideas he disapproved, despite the fact that he had for her as sincere an affection as he ever permitted his financial mind to hold for anybody.

"Well, well," he said, "this is an honor. How's the suffragette to-day?"

"Very well, thank you," she replied, shaking hands. "How's the Shylock?"

"Ah, Alice, that is unkind!"

"No more so than what you said," she retorted. "But I didn't come here to talk politics. I came to borrow money."

"Why, my dear," Bowers exclaimed, "you astonish me! Come; tell me all about it."

He led the way to his office. As soon as they were seated, he repeated his request.

"I don't see anything astonishing in it," Miss Dutton said. "You lend money—I need money, and I have the collateral to get it with." She handed him the package of papers she had been carrying, and he opened it and examined its contents. "I want to borrow ten thousand dollars on those, to deposit to the credit of the *Sun*."

The banker leaned back in his chair.

"You don't mean to say you intend to send good money after bad by giving that young fool Cooley ten thousand dollars more to throw away for you?"

"Certainly not," she replied, smiling brightly. "I don't mean to—and am not going to—say any such thing. That's what *you* said. What I say is that I'm going to put ten thousand dollars more to Mr. Cooley's credit in order——"

"I can not permit you to do anything so utterly foolish," Bowers interrupted. "I should think you would have learned by this time, after watching your fortune of practically one hundred thousand dollars dwindle away bit by bit as a result of Cooley's crazy ideas, that the wisest thing to do is to discharge him, employ an editor who has some regard for the leaders of the community, and endeavor to get your money back before it is too late."

The fire of the zealot for his cause came into Alice Dutton's eyes at this challenge.

"My fortune has not dwindled away as a result of Mr. Cooley's 'crazy ideas,' but as a result of the selfishness, short-sightedness or corruption of your leaders of the community, who seem determined to make the *Sun* protect them in their various grafts or wreck it."

"Call it what you wish," retorted the banker, "the fact remains that the *Sun* has spent all of its receipts and nearly a hundred thousand dollars—your fortune—since Cooley took charge of it a year ago. That doesn't look like good management to me."

"It's just this good, Mr. Bowers: While our merchant friends have been withdrawing advertising because we insist on printing the truth about everybody, the people of Prairie City have acquired a strikingly noticeable habit of buying and reading the *Sun*. Our circulation has grown under Mr. Cooley's editorship from eighteen thousand to thirty-eight thousand. Inside of another six months it will be so big that advertisers will have to use our paper in self-defense, whether they like it or not."

"Perhaps—perhaps," Bowers muttered.

"No 'perhaps' at all—it's a fact; but in the mean time we need a little more money. Will you lend it to me on those securities?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't do it."

"*Won't* do it, you mean."

"Let me explain," began Bowers. "Ordinarily I could do it, but just at present I couldn't lend a dollar to anybody. You are probably not aware that in towns like Prairie City national banks are required by Federal law to keep a certain part of their deposits—a reserve—on hand at all times. Well, unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately for you—we are very close to our minimun reserve."

"And you can't lend any more money until your reserve goes up—is that it?"

"Exactly," Bowers replied.

"But suppose Milton K. Stanberry or the street-car company or some other big business interest that requires large sums of money should have to have some to-day, and should ask you for a loan—what would you do?"

Assuming his most dignified and righteous air, Bowers replied:

"Much as it would grieve me, Alice, I would be under the painful necessity of refusing the accommodation. Otherwise——"

"Otherwise what?"

"A national-bank examiner might happen along just then to take a look at our books, or the comptroller might call for a statement, and if we were caught below a safe reserve, it is not at all unlikely the government would be provoked."

"Then you won't lend me the money?"

"I *can't* lend you the money."

Alice gathered up her stocks and bonds, folded them and slipped a rubber band about them.

"I'm *very* much disappointed," she said, "for Mr. Cooley *must* have a little more money right away to tide him over the next few weeks, and I didn't suppose there'd be the least difficulty raising it on these securities."

"I'm exceedingly sorry, Alice, but—by the way, where did you get those stocks and bonds? I thought all your father left you was the *Sun* and his life insurance."

"This was a secret bequest. Years ago father bought these and put them away for me as a nest-egg if ever I got married."

"And you would reward a father's loving forethought by pouring the money into a rat-hole?" asked Bowers.

"No," Alice replied with a smile, as she rose to depart; "into a gold mine, Mr. Bowers."

BEFORE Miss Dutton reached the front door of the bank, she encountered Milton K. Stanberry.

"How do you do, Mr. Stanberry?" she said. "Don't look so frightened; I won't bite."

"I'm not the least frightened, Miss Dutton, I assure you," said he, "but, naturally, after the unfortunate incident in my store yesterday, I was—ah—startled to meet you so suddenly."

"How's the strike?" Alice asked.

"I didn't know there was one, but you interest me. Tell me about it."

"I haven't time; you can find out all about it in the *Sun*. Good-by."

His tormentor slipped through the door, leaving him a mocking smile for comfort. Stanberry walked over to the depositors' desk and wrote busily for three or four minutes. He then turned toward Bowers' desk, but had to wait a few minutes for that gentleman, who was seated in a private telephone-booth beyond his office holding brief but very earnest conversations with several parties at the other end of the wires.

"What can I do for you, Milton?" asked Bowers when he left the telephone and found the merchant standing at the railing.

"Nothing much," replied Stanberry, handing the banker a slip of paper. "I just want to negotiate a little loan."

"Certainly," said Bowers, taking a note already filled out from his friend's hand. "How much do you need?"

"Twenty thousand."

"Always glad to accommodate you, Milton," responded Bowers. Then, raising his voice, he called, "Oh, Mr. Dutton, enter this note as a credit of twenty thousand dollars to the account of the Stanberry Stores."

Dutton left his cage, took the O. K.'d note from Bowers, returned to his desk and duly entered it. Stanberry held out his hand to the banker and said,

"Thank you very much, Jeremiah."

"Not at all, Milton. Always glad to accommodate you."

THE next caller at the bank was about as popular as a cop at a home-brew party, even though he was destined, a short hour and a half later, to be received with open arms. Upon Henry Cooley's entrance at this moment, however, Bowers turned off the flow of amiability reserved for friends like Stanberry and became once more the austere, conservative financier.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bowers," said Cooley cordially. "I want to talk business with you for about three minutes."

"What can I do for you, sir?" Bowers asked coldly.

"I want ten thousand dollars."

"Anything else?"

"Not to-day."

"Then I'll have to ask you to excuse me; I'm busy."

Bowers turned to his desk and began reading the top one of a pile of open letters. Cooley leaned over the railing.

"I said I wanted ten thousand dollars."

"I heard you," Bowers said, without looking up.

"Do I get it?"

"You do not."

Cooley straightened up again and cleared his throat.

"Hm. Something in your manner told me you were going to say that," he remarked.

Still intent on his letter, Bowers replied, "You're a young man of keen insight."

"I thank you," Cooley said, bowing; "but I'd prefer coin to compliments."

Bowers sat up in his chair and looked the editor over slowly.

"On what ground do you solicit a loan of ten thousand dollars?"

"Principally my nerve," replied Cooley, "although I thought you might also be interested in this little bundle of gilt-edged stocks and bonds—market value about twenty thousand."

He tossed a package of papers on to Bowers's desk and the banker opened them and began looking them over.

"Don't they speak for themselves?" Cooley asked. "Are they good? And are you still too busy to see me?"

"I'm exceedingly sorry," Bowers replied; "but owing to circumstances over which I have no control, I am unable to negotiate the loan. Money is very tight, and my reserve is——"

Cooley held up his hand.

"Don't give me that low-reserve bunk," he told Bowers. "You can't get away with it. If every banker in the country whose reserve was below normal should go to jail at this minute, Leavenworth and Atlanta would be in the hands of the money trust. What's the answer? Is it the *Sun?* Are you peeved at what we've been printing?"

"Your policy with the *Sun*, Mr. Cooley, has been a great shock to the staid, conservative citizens of Prairie City. You could hardly expect a man of such violent ideas as yourself to be received with enthusiasm when he asks for help from such a substantial institution as the Prairie City National Bank."

"So that's it, is it?" Cooley demanded. "Because we are fighting for low street-car fares to Lakeside Park, and trying to help the retail clerks get living wages, and blocking the attempt of a rich merchant to steal the public sidewalk, and exposing another for violating the fire-escape laws, and demanding that you pay interest on the city deposits—because we are doing these things, we are a menace to the staid, conservative citizens, are we?"

"You misunderstand me, sir," protested the banker.

"Oh, no, I don't!" Cooley declared. "I understand you perfectly. We can't do those things—things which make for human decency and progress and honesty—and then come into the bank where we carry a substantial account and negotiate a perfectly safe loan on ample security. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"I dare not lend any more money until my reserve is larger," said Bowers, with a weary gesture. "I am the shepherd. My depositors and stockholders are my flock. They look to me to guide them safely through——"

"Spare yourself—and me," interrupted

Cooley. "Especially me. In regular language, there's nothing doing?"

"You may have it that way if you wish."

"May I? That's awfully kind of you. Then there is *something* you'll let me have, isn't there?" He turned and started toward the door. "So long, Mr. Bowers. Any time we can do anything for you over at the *Sun* office, let me know. I'll be delighted to accommodate you—provided my reserve isn't too low."

BOWERS turned to his desk without responding and Cooley continued toward the door, but before reaching it met Harvey Willis, the principal in the fire-escape case, who stopped him and led him to a bench at the side of the room, with the statement that he wanted to talk to him. While they were engaged in conversation Bowers resumed his busy telephoning in the private booth. Cooley was surprised when his foe of the day before, with friendly manner and words, brought up the question of renewing his advertising contract.

"I was going over to see you this afternoon," he told Cooley.

"Fine!" said Cooley. "Of course you want to renew your contract?"

"Certainly," answered Willis. Cooley could not restrain a start of surprise. "I'm ready to sign right now if you are," continued the merchant.

Taking a blank form of contract out of his pocket, Cooley said:

"I always carry a few blanks with me, so as to get a customer before he changes his mind. Let's see—it was twelve thousand inches at fifty cents—wasn't it?—last year. You want the same space-rate and terms, I suppose?"

"That's right," said Willis.

With a fountain pen and his stocks and bonds as a rest, Cooley filled in the blank spaces, signed the document and handed it and the pen to Willis, who read the contract, touched the pen to the paper and then held it suspended while he looked Cooley squarely in the eye.

"Of course, Mr. Cooley, you understand," he said, "that if I sign this contract the *Sun* agrees to stop that fire-escape agitation."

Cooley gave him back his direct look.

"That rests entirely with you, Mr. Willis. The *Sun* will stop its fight for fire-escapes when you put the fire-escapes on, and not a minute sooner."

Willis's gaze turned into astonishment.

"Why—why," he stammered, "I thought—I supposed—when I read that attack on me yesterday, or, rather, when I got to thinking it over last night, I thought, of course, you were hammering me into line for this new contract. I—I—I supposed if I'd sign a new contract—you'd let up, and——"

Cooley shook his head.

"The *Sun* prints all the news, Mr. Willis," he said. "When a building inspector notifies the owner of a building that he will be restrained from using his property unless he complies with the fire-escape law, that is news, and it's going into the paper."

"I never heard of anything so ridiculous," Willis protested. "Newspapers always protect their advertisers. It's a give-and-take proposition. Do you mean to say you refuse that contract unless I agree to let you keep on hammering me?"

"I most certainly refuse to accept it on your terms," asserted Cooley.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Willis. "Of all the young fools— What's the matter? Isn't the contract big enough? Do you want more space? Is the rate too low? I'll agree to anything reasonable."

"Space-rates and contract have nothing to do with it," declared Cooley. "We are going to print things about your fire-escapeless building whenever there's news in it, because our readers are entitled to the information."

"But that's absurd!" said Willis. "You don't make any money out of your circulation. Don't talk to me about your readers. It's the advertiser who makes the paper."

"No; you're wrong," Cooley replied. "It's the reader who makes the paper—not by the money he spends for the paper but by the fact that he is a reader, that he sees your advertisement and goes to your store to trade. If it wasn't for the reader, you couldn't afford to advertise, and you would not advertise. Yesterday you had decided not to use the *Sun*. To-day you want to make a contract, not to get business for your store but to buy our silence. Well, we don't want your advertising on any such basis. We should be cheating you to take it on any such basis. We want your business, but we want it because you believe the trade you will get through our paper will make it a good investment for you. We won't have it for any other reason. Will you sign that contract on those terms?"

"I will not," Willis responded emphatically, "and, furthermore, I'll show you that you can't go round this town printing scandals about respectable people and respectable law-abiding firms and get by with it. We won't stand for sensational yellow journalism in this town."

Cooley held his temper. He merely said,

"The stuff the *Sun* prints won't be sensational and yellow unless the facts are sensational and yellow; and the facts will be printed, whatever their color."

"We'll see about that!" Willis shot at him menacingly, and strode angrily from the building.

A feeling of depression and discouragement, the first he had experienced during his long campaign, settled over Cooley as he watched Willis, whose squared shoulders even seemed to speak defiance, disappear through the door, but he threw it off as he heard the oily voice of Bowers, who came up behind him.

"I'm sorry about the loan, Mr. Cooley," he said. "Perhaps you could get it at one of the other banks."

"Perhaps I could," remarked Cooley, smiling significantly, "but, do you know, I have a sort of feeling that I couldn't."

In spite of his statement to Bowers, Cooley left that gentleman with the intention of making the rounds of the other banks of Prairie City in the hope of finding one banker who would accommodate him.

ALMOST immediately after Cooley's departure, Bowers had another interesting caller in the person of Phil Perkins.

"Hello, Jerry! How's the market?" asked Perkins, walking familiarly into Bowers' office and helping himself to a chair. "I just got up," he added.

"A trifle off to-day, Philip, but nothing to worry about," Bowers replied. "Our margin is plenty wide enough to protect us. Have you any news?"

"Yes; I got another tip last night—going in on it heavy. You better get aboard."

"If it is reliable, Philip, I may consider joining you in a little investment."

"You mean in a gamble," said Perkins.

"Philip, Philip, how many times must I tell you that I *never* gamble?"

"That's just the difference between you and me, Jerry. I'm a gambler—and proud of it. You're a gambler—and ashamed of it."

"A rose by any other name doesn't always smell as sweet, Philip. But, tell me—what is your new tip?"

The two men talked earnestly in low tones for ten minutes, at the end of which Perkins said:

"Business is rotten or I wouldn't fool with it. Only ten thousand last week—think of that! And it's all the fault of that damned editor."

"'No man knoweth,'" mourned Bowers, "'when he lieth down at night to what he will awaken in the morning.'"

"By the way," Perkins added, "I'll need a little more money for that deal."

"Just give me your note for whatever you require."

"Oh, about fifteen thousand will be enough. We ought to be able to make the turn in thirty days, but I'll make the note for sixty days, to be on the safe side."

"That will be all right, Philip, and if anything should happen, you can extend it."

Perkins filled out a note for fifteen thousand dollars, and, as in the case of Stanberry, Bowers put his initials on it and turned it over to Dutton to place to Perkins' credit. The gambler thanked his friend and, with a brief nod, departed. Quiet had again spread over the bank and Bowers had again turned his attention to his mail when Theodore Walker entered and walked rapidly to Bowers' office.

"What's this I hear about your reserve being low?" demanded Walker, who, of all the group of leading business men in Prairie City, held Bowers in least awe. "Two different people have told it to me in the last half-hour."

Bowers assumed his pious attitude.

"The Prairie City National Bank is as solid as Gibraltar," he intoned.

"Back up, Jerry!" irreverently said Walker. "I'm no Fourth-of-July audience. What's the straight of it?"

"Cooley wanted to borrow ten thousand dollars—on good security—to bolster up the waning strength of the *Sun*. Alice Dutton wanted the same thing—on different but equally good securities—and I turned them both down on the statement that my reserve was low."

Walker's face brightened.

"Are they hard up?" he asked.

"I'm very much afraid they are badly in need of money."

"Fine! But what about the bank?"

"Well, Theodore, the fact is that our reserve is just a mite less than it ought to be."

"Have you been gambling again?" asked Walker, scowling.

"Perish the thought! I never gamble. How often must I tell you that?"

The street-railway president bowed.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I always forget that you keep one hand on the Bible. Have you, then, been making any more 'investments' in the stock-market?"

Bowers placed his hand on his heart.

"None; I swear it," he solemnly declared.

"You'd better call in some loans," advised Walker, "gather in some more deposits, and sit tight for a while, Bowers. You're entirely too well satisfied always just barely to miss the penitentiary. If that story gets around town, it might start a run."

"The people of Prairie City have implicit faith in me and my bank," said Bowers.

"They haven't got faith in anybody when they think they're going to lose money," sagely observed Walker, turning and starting for the door. "You take my advice, or some day you'll get into big trouble," he added, as he left the bank by the side entrance next to Bowers' office.

AT ALMOST the same moment Henry Cooley opened the door of his private office on the first floor of the Prairie City *Sun* building and nearly collided with his fair employer. He still held in his hand the package of securities which he had shown to Bowers a short time before, and he observed that Alice Dutton carried in her hand a similar package. She saw what he held at the same instant. He quickly hid his package behind him, and she did the same. Simultaneously each realized that the other had recognized the character of the documents.

"What have you in your hand?" asked Miss Dutton.

"What have you?" he countered.

"The same thing that you have," replied the young woman. "Tell me, Mr. Cooley; what were you going to do with those?"

He hesitated an instant, and then:

"Trying to borrow ten thousand dollars for the *Sun*. What were you going to do with yours?"

"The same thing," she answered.

"Thank God you can't do it!"

"Neither can you."

"How do you know?"

"I've already tried and been turned down," replied Miss Dutton.

"So have I," said Cooley.

They entered his office and took chairs on opposite sides of his desk. Miss Dutton appeared concerned and also deeply touched by her discovery.

"You told me you were a poor man," she said.

"I am," answered Cooley.

"Where did you get those securities?"

"I borrowed them—from my mother."

"Your mother is wealthy?"

Cooley held up his packet.

"This is all," he said.

"And you were willing to risk it in the *Sun?*"

"Yes," Cooley responded.

"Why?"

Cooley leaned forward eagerly. Into his eyes leaped a light which made Alice Dutton catch her breath and lower her glance.

"You know why. You know the reason I am putting every ounce of my muscle and brain and energy into the Prairie City *Sun*. You know why I want it to succeed."

The young woman looked bravely and steadily into Cooley's eyes, and back of that braveness and steadiness Cooley saw the tenderest look he had ever beheld in the eyes of any woman.

"I know that you must succeed because your principles are right," she said evenly, "because you and I believe in them sincerely, because we want to help the people of Prairie City to be prosperous and happy, and because we want to encourage other newspapers to be courageous and independent——"

"But that isn't all I want," interrupted Cooley.

"It's all you want to ask now," she told him. "You must not think of anything else, but even to achieve that success you have no right to risk your mother's little fortune. I will not allow you to do it." She leaned over the desk and thrust her packet into his hand. "Here," she added;

"take what's left of my fortune. Get more money and continue the fight."

"I can always provide for my mother," protested Cooley, "even if I should lose her money. I won't let you risk any more of yours. I've used approximately a hundred thousand dollars already. I won't allow you——"

Miss Dutton rose with a smile and pointed to her securities, which Cooley had put down on the desk between them.

"The time has come for me to assume the rôle of proprietor," she said. "As owner of the Prairie City *Sun*, I command you, my editor, to take my securities, call on the bankers, borrow ten thousand dollars wherever you can get it and deposit it to the credit of the paper."

"Suppose I refuse?" queried Cooley, rising and putting both packages into his pocket. "I presume I'd get fired."

"Promptly."

"Well," said Cooley, picking up his hat, "I don't want to lose my job, so I guess I'll run along. I'll have to hurry if I want to separate any of those financiers from that much money before three o'clock."

"Good-by, and remember my orders," Miss Dutton said, as Cooley reached the door.

"I'll never forget one word that you've said this afternoon," was his answer, which, among other things, sent that interested and interesting young woman home in a glow of happiness.

BACK in the Prairie City National Bank, Jim Austin, having encountered Susan Gregg on the street while making the rounds of his diminishing list of *Sun* advertisers, hovered near the independent young society reporter while she prepared a deposit-slip for the weekly increment to her little nest-egg and again pleaded with her to name the day.

"Wisen up, Jim," she advised him; "wisen up. You get thirty dollars a week, don't you?"

"But two can live cheaper than one."

"With beefsteak sixty cents a pound?"

"And when the *Sun* gets to making money," he continued, "I'll get a raise."

"When the *Sun* gets to making money!" exclaimed Susan. "That's a fine date for a wedding!"

"You don't know Henry Cooley like I do," Austin declared. "He's going to put that paper over."

"Over the bumps!"

"Will you marry me when I get my raise?"

"I will—which is just the same as taking an oath to stay single."

They were interrupted by Jack Dutton, who came through the revolving door on the run, making the four movable panes of glass spin like a top.

"Mr. Bowers," he cried excitedly, dashing across the room to the railing in front of the banker's office, "there's hell to pay! Somebody has started a story about the bank. A half-dozen men asked me about it on my way back from lunch."

"What's that?" demanded Bowers, springing to his feet.

"They say the bank's shaky. The story is running up and down Chestnut Street. There's a crowd of people down on the corner yelling about the bank, and as soon as somebody starts 'em, they'll be coming to get their money. Better lock the doors."

Bowers' calm dignity vanished. At Dutton's news he wrung his hands, waved his arms and seemed wholly unable to control himself. Stanberry rushed in through the side door, almost as excited. Bowers turned to him with trembling hands.

"What is it, Milton?" he asked.

"Alice Dutton started it," said Stanberry. "She said you told her the bank was unsound. She——"

Bowers ran from one side of the room to the other.

"What will I do, Milton?" he demanded, clinging for a moment to his friend's arm. "What will I do? I haven't got the money—I'm ruined—they'll break me— For God's sake, somebody do something!"

Young Jack Dutton and Jim Austin, inexperienced, light-hearted, and believed at times to be actually frivolous because their care-free, happy dispositions hid their sense of responsibility, took charge of the situation.

"We'll go under sure, Mr. Bowers," said Dutton, seizing his employer by the arm and stopping his mad charge around the room, "unless you can get help in ten minutes. Call up the clearing-house. Call up the Second National. We've got to have more cash."

Dutton rushed Bowers to the latter's

desk, shoved him unceremoniously into his chair and set the telephone at his elbow. Austin and Stanberry ran to the front window.

"There's a crowd in front of Smith's drug store," said Stanberry. "Somebody's making a speech. I can hear 'em cheer."

From a distance the sound of cheers floated faintly through the room, making Bowers tremble from head to foot, but also galvanizing him to sensible action at the telephone. Austin gripped Stanberry's arm.

"Look at the mob coming up the street, only two blocks away!" said he. "Somebody's at the head of it. Stanberry, this is damned serious business."

Stanberry called back to Bowers:

"Hold the fort, Jerry; I'll be back in a minute! Maybe I can stop 'em." Then he whirled through the door and walked rapidly toward the approaching crowd. At the telephone, Bowers frantically demanded a number, imploring an apparently unconcerned central to help him in the name of everything he could think of to call to his aid. Harvey Willis rushed into the bank and demanded from Dutton the exact amount of his balance.

"I don't know and I don't give a damn," Dutton told him; whereupon Willis pulled a bundle of papers out of his pocket and began a series of lightning calculations in an endeavor to figure it out himself. Susan Gregg hurriedly wrote a check for the amount of her balance.

"You're crazy," Austin said to her. "The bank is perfectly safe. You'll only make matters worse."

"Safe my eye," retorted Susan, "with Bowers running round here like a crazy man! *I* think he's a crook."

A teller ran from behind his cage to Bowers' office.

"Shall I lock the doors?" he demanded of the pitiful figure still at the telephone.

"For God's sake, yes!" gasped Bowers. "What time is it?"

"A quarter of three," the teller replied, starting forward to lock the front door.

Austin and Dutton grabbed him and hauled him back.

"Don't do that, you fool!" cried Austin. "That's sure ruin. Get back to your place."

The noise of the approaching crowd grew slightly louder. Austin could see it had been halted momentarily and that Stanberry was standing precariously on a fire-hydrant, talking and gesticulating emphatically. The minute-hand was crawling ever so slowly toward three o'clock, but he could tell from the sounds coming from the street that Stanberry could not hold back the crowd until closing-time. He turned to Dutton.

"Do you know who the old man's trying to get on the 'phone—the place where he could get a lot of money?" he asked.

"Sure," Dutton replied. "He's after Will Southwell over at the Second National, head of the clearing-house."

"Beat it over there and lug back all the money you can get," commanded Austin. "Have him lend you some of his people to help you."

Dutton was half-way through the door before Austin stopped speaking, and the same spin which his departure gave to it whirled Judson Peters into the bank.

"The devil and Tom Walker's broke loose!" he exclaimed, rushing to the paying-teller's window. Calling back to Bowers, he said, "They say you've absconded with half a million!"

PASSING a check through the window, Peters received twenty-one thousand five-hundred dollars in bills of large denomination, which he jammed into various pockets. Susan cashed her little check and then went back to Bowers' desk and relieved him of the telephone, saying she would get his number quicker than he could.

"Get Will Southwell," he told her, "and tell him I want a half a million in currency in five minutes or I'm ruined."

Bowers turned dazedly from his desk to behold Phil Perkins calmly writing a check at the high counter in the center of the room.

"Sorry, Jerry," remarked Perkins; "but I have to have cash in my business."

"You're not turning against me, are you, Philip?" moaned the banker. "You're not drawing that money I loaned you to-day?"

"That's just what I'm doing," said Perkins coolly.

Behind Perkins was Willis, his figure now exact and his check made out. Bowers seized him by the shoulders.

"Don't do it, Harvey; don't!" he implored. "You know your money's safe in my bank."

"I know it's safer in my vault to-day," replied Willis, handing in his check, which called for thirty-four thousand three hundred and fourteen dollars. The paying teller consumed as much time as possible in counting it, while Bowers stood by, watching the bills of large denomination pass through his employee's fingers.

"This is all a horrible mistake!" he groaned, when the money had changed hands; but he started and cringed when a sudden outburst from the crowd, drawing nearer every moment, told him it was only a matter of minutes when they would be at his door and possibly at his throat.

"Hear them!" cried Bowers. "Hear them! The vultures! They've got me down, and now they're coming to feast! I tell you it's a mistake. That crazy woman misunderstood me."

As the clamor outside grew louder and louder, he turned desperately to the paying-teller's window.

"How long can we last?" he asked, glancing at the clock, which had moved forward less than five minutes since the first alarm was sounded at two-forty-five.

"Not till three o'clock if we get any more heavy ones," the teller answered.

SUDDENLY the crowd was at the front door, struggling through the revolving panels, which, in a moment, crashed as the whole door was broken and swept from its upper and lower pins. An instant later a brick sailed through the large plate-glass window beside the door and the air was filled with things that drove Bowers, cowering, hands over ears, to his office, where he threw himself face down on his desk and wept. In spite of his efforts to keep them out, however, his ears were struck by brutal cries of: "Lynch him!" "Tear down the bank!" "I want my money!" "Where is he?" Men struggled with men to get to the paying-teller's window. Some had checks already written and fought with each other for payment. Others pushed and shoved to get to the tall counter to write checks. Fear of loss and anger at the supposed cause of it swept through the mob, which, leaderless and purposeless, except that everybody wanted his money, yelled and struggled until the high-ceilinged room echoed to the din. Stanberry and Theodore Walker rushed in through the side door and fought with the others to reach the paying teller.

Fearing that the crowd would do violence to Bowers or wreck the building, and believing that there was not time enough before three o'clock to draw all the available currency out of the bank, Austin fought his way to the high counter, climbed up on it, and started beating time with both hands and singing a chant which everybody knew:

"Over there, over there;
Send the word, send the word over there,
That the Yanks are coming——"

By the time he had sung the chorus through once, everybody had ceased yelling and struggling to stare in amazement and to wonder why that crazy man was singing. There came a second when Austin's voice was the only sound in the bank, and he seized it vigorously.

"Now, stop milling around and yelling and fighting!" he commanded. "This bank's got plenty of money; but it won't pay out a cent to a howling mob. Form in line at the paying-teller's window, there—everybody who has his check ready. Everybody else form in line to pass this desk and write his check. That's right. Now, let's go about this in an orderly manner."

Austin waited eagerly to see if his trick worked. After an instant's hesitation, it did. People muttered and grumbled, but began forming in line as requested, and just as the minute-hand stood at two minutes to three, the tall, commanding figure of Henry Cooley, followed by two men bearing double armfuls of small sacks, came through the demolished door.

"What an uproar!" said Cooley, for whom a path was opened to the tall desk in the center. "What a fuss! What a party for such a beautiful day! Is this a surprise for Mr. Bowers? Is this a reward for his long years of service to the community? What do you all want, anyway—money?"

The two men behind Cooley deposited their sacks on the high counter. Cooley placed his hand on them and looked at the mystified group surrounding him.

"If money is the only thing you want," he said, "help yourselves. Here's loads of it—and there's more where this came from." Glancing at the assembly, Cooley noted the faces of certain men very well known to him. He smiled and continued: "Why, if there isn't my old friend Stanberry! And Willis! And Peters! And Phil Perkins, and the whole happy family! What's the matter? Were you afraid you'd lose your little mites? Cheer up! Jim"—turning to Austin—"help these men bring in some more of that money, will you?"

"Sure!" said Austin. "Where is it?"

"Outside—a wagon-load of it."

While Austin and Cooley's two helpers were bringing in more sacks, the people in the crowd began to look shamefacedly at each other, and murmurs of: "He's all right!" "Pshaw, the bank isn't going to bust!" "Where'd he get it?" and "A wagon-load of money!" could be heard.

"Yes, dear friends," said Cooley; "a wagon-load of money! I heard the uproar, grabbed one of our circulation wagons, made the rounds of the banks and here I am. Anybody who wants his money step right up and get it."

NOBODY came forward, for the curious thing about a run on a bank is that if a depositor knows he can get his money, he doesn't want it. Cooley waited a moment and then said:

"Now, don't you think it's about time to call this little party off? Aren't you folks sort of ashamed of yourselves?"

Harvey Willis was the first to act. Striding to the receiving-teller's window, he disgorged the money he had received.

"I'm sorry I drew it out," he said.

Peters and Perkins followed Willis's example; the crowd cheered Cooley and slowly dispersed, while Stanberry and Walker turned to Bowers, face down on his desk, hands over his ears.

"Cheer up, Jerry; it's all over!" said Walker, laying his hand on the banker's shoulder.

"Did they break us?" Bowers asked, his ears still covered.

"Not by a damn sight!" Walker told him. "Your *friend*, Mr. Cooley, stopped the run."

Bowers got slowly to his feet and stared about the room. He saw the wrecked front of his bank. He saw the sacks piled on the tall desk. He observed the young editor, standing beside the desk and smiling at him in friendly manner. Gradually he squared his shoulders and regained command of himself. Dignity and suavity were beginning to radiate from his person once more. Peters approached him apologetically.

"We're sorry we lost faith in you for a few minutes, Bowers," said he. "We apologize."

Bowers bowed, almost himself again, and smiled upon the group.

"I accept your apology, gentlemen," he said. "Even the most conservative and self-possessed are likely in times of great stress to lose their poise. I——"

He was interrupted by the arrival, on the run, of Jack Dutton.

"Mr. Southwell said he'd send over half a million immediately!" he gasped.

Bowers and the others stared at him uncomprehendingly, and then turned to Cooley.

"If that's what Southwell says," exclaimed Bowers, "where did you get all that money?"

Cooley laughed, picked up one of the sacks, untied the string at its neck and poured out on the top of the tall desk a stream of—type. Bowers grabbed a handful and looked at it.

"Why," he cried, "it's—it's type!"

"Out of my composing-room," said Cooley. "New lot—just received."

Bowers rushed upon Cooley with outstretched hands.

"How can I ever thank you?" he asked.

"You can't," Cooley answered.

"But surely you will permit me to show my appreciation in some substantial form. Now, that loan you were asking about this morning—perhaps it might be arranged."

Cooley's smile vanished.

"Do you imagine for one minute that I stopped that run out of regard for you?" he demanded.

Before Bowers could reply, the telephone-bell rang, and Dutton, who was nearest to Bowers' office, answered it. So tense was every one's nerves that all listened, as if the instrument might be opening another chapter in the drama all hoped had closed.

"Your city editor wants you, Mr. Cooley," said Dutton, after holding the receiver to his ear a moment. Cooley strode to the railing, leaned over it to Bowers' desk, rested one elbow on the pile of letters which had so engrossed the banker's attention earlier in the day, and spoke into the instrument.

"Hello! . . . Yes; this is Cooley. Is that you, Patchin? . . No, no! Do nothing of the kind. Don't get out any extra at all. Just print a short story in the home edition saying the run didn't amount to anything—started by an erroneous report."

A FEW nights later, Lakeside Park was the center of interest for people of all classes in Prairie City. The lake, like everything else in and about the town, lay in a flat brown prairie, its attractions being only the artificiality of rustic benches, transplanted, scrawny cottonwoods, gravel walks, muddy banks and the usual features of an imitation Coney Island. But it was the town's only place for recreation, and the street-car company, which owned it, encouraged patronage by special "nights" for the various societies and organizations of the city. This occasion was "Retail Merchants' Night," and extensive advertising, a list of distinguished patronesses and hot weather had brought to the resort not only the clerks, mechancis and other working people and their families but the more exclusive set also.

On the bank of the lake, somewhat distant from the side-show variety of attractions and adjacent to a refreshment pavilion, was a bit of smooth, open ground, flanked by a struggling cottonwood tree and a string of colored electric lights, and furnished with several rustic benches, usually deserted by the romantic young visitors because of the excess of illumination, but patronized gratefully by the older people. On one of these Stanberry and Bowers were engaged in earnest conversation.

"How does Cooley expect to get along after he's lost all his advertising?" Stanberry asked.

"Cooley and Miss Dutton together have between thirty and forty thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edged securities," said Bowers.

"But you're not going to lend them any money, are you?" Stanberry inquired.

"I am not," emphatically replied Bowers, "and neither is any other banker in Prairie City; but they could borrow it in Chicago or New York, or they could sell their stocks and bonds, although they would hate to do that, because the market is so low now."

"Then something else must be done," declared Stanberry. "If that newspaper goes on the way it's been doing the past year, Prairie City will be ruined."

Bowers glanced carefully around.

"Something else *will* be done," he said. "The Lord has placed in my hands the instrument of His vengeance, and I shall not hesitate to use it; but before I resort to my plan, it would be well for every large advertiser to withdraw from the *Sun*. Perhaps Mr. Cooley could then be made to see the folly of his ways. If not, I fear it will be necessary to use extreme measures."

"That's all arranged," Stanberry told him. "Every big advertiser has been seen, and every one who has not already done so has agreed to quit to-morrow."

With a sigh of satisfaction Bowers rose from the bench and looked at his watch. He congratulated his friend on lining up the retail merchants, and urged that they find the others and act promptly in applying the pressure to Cooley. Stanberry agreed to the idea, and together they walked away.

Stanberry and Bowers were hardly out of sight when Cooley and Alice Dutton, observing the empty benches, strolled over and took possession of one. Cooley was telling her about the run on the bank.

"And after you had stopped the run, he offered to lend you the money?" she asked.

"Yes," Cooley replied. "He said he wanted to show his appreciation in some substantial manner. Of course I refused—with thanks. As I recall it, with heartfelt thanks."

"I can almost feel the heartfeltness," said Miss Dutton, laughing.

"I felt as if my securities were no better than they had been an hour before," Cooley said.

Miss Dutton's face showed surprise.

"*Your* securities?" she exclaimed.

Cooley stammered but could say nothing intelligible, and Miss Dutton laid her hand on his arm.

"Look at me!" she commanded. "When you left me at the office and went around to see the bankers, you tried to borrow money on *my* collateral, didn't you?"

Cooley placed his hand on hers and held it tightly.

"To be perfectly honest," he answered, "I did not. I disobeyed orders. Are you going to fire me?"

Miss Dutton slowly withdrew hand.

"No," she said slowly; "I'm not going

to fire you—and you know it. You knew it when you violated instructions, but——"

"Yes?" Cooley interrupted, leaning forward eagerly and stretching out his hand toward hers, lying, pink-tipped, in her lap.

"You must not take advantage of that knowledge to embarrass me," said she, clasping her hands and avoiding his threatened touch. "I do not care enough for my hundred thousand dollars to let you risk your mother's little fortune. I care—I have too great a regard for you to allow you to run the chance of losing that money in—in an effort to help me."

"If you insist on using your securities to raise money for the *Sun*, I'll resign," declared Cooley solemnly.

"Oh, you wouldn't do that!"

"Just as sure as I'm sitting on this bench," was his grim response.

"But it's my newspaper and my fortune," she protested. "If I lose both, nobody will be hurt but me."

The young editor leaned toward her until his shoulder pressed against hers, causing her heart to run away in a mad delirium of happiness.

"If you lose your fortune and your newspaper," said he earnestly, "it would be because you staked them on my theories of journalism and my ability as an editor. I should never have a happy moment in my life if I knew that *I* had brought that misfortune upon you."

She drew away from him and raised her eyes for a moment, but had to drop them at what she saw in his.

"It would make no difference in my happiness," she murmured, almost in a whisper, "or in my regard for you."

"That's the reason I can't let you do any more for me," he told her.

"Why can't I do what I please with my own?" she asked.

"You can," said he; "but not if I'm to be your editor."

Startled by his earnestness and determination, the first manifestation of those characteristics she had felt directed against her, she said,

"If I put up my collateral, you'll resign?"

"Yes."

"Very well," she said. "It's diamond cut diamond. If you use your securities, I'll discharge you."

Cooley gazed at her intently for a full minute, but her eyes did not flinch. He rose and paced up and down in front of her half a dozen times without speaking. Then he resumed his seat beside her.

"I don't see but that we'll have to struggle along without any more money," he said.

"Can we pull through?" she asked.

"Yes—through bankruptcy. Why won't you be reasonable about——"

"Why won't you?" she interrupted.

Cooley leaned toward her impulsively.

"I want to protect you because I—because I—" And then shut his jaws firmly, but not his eyes.

Alice Dutton gave him stab for stab with her eyes and said,

"And I want to protect your mother because I—because I—" And then closed her lips firmly.

With a wrench, Cooley sprang to his feet.

"I can't tell you now," he said. "I can't say what I want to say as long as the *Sun* hangs in the balance—and it's because I want to say that that I am determined to use my stocks and bonds for the paper. You make it awfully hard for——"

Miss Dutton rose and faced him, smiling with tender understanding.

"Then don't you understand," she pleaded, "why I won't let you risk your mother's money, and why I want to risk mine? I want you to say what you want to say—when the *Sun* is a success, and I——"

"Then I'll make the *Sun* go without any more money," declared Cooley.

"I do so want you to succeed," said Alice, with glowing eyes, as she tucked her arm through his and with him started for the little open-air theatre, where they were due to join a party of friends for the evening's vaudeville entertainment.

DURING the intermission Cooley strolled out of the theatre to smoke and stretch his long legs. Presently he was approached by Judson Peters.

"I've been looking for you, Cooley," said Peters. "I want to see you."

"Strain your vision no longer," Cooley told him. "Behold me in the flesh."

"I'm in no mood for joking. Come over here where we won't be interrupted."

He led the way to a rustic seat that stood by itself, well off a gravel walk running from the theatre to the roller-coaster.

"I didn't like that story you printed about my grabbing the public sidewalk," he informed the editor, when they were seated.

"I didn't, either," Cooley replied.

"Then what made you publish it?"

"Oh, it wasn't the printing of the story I disliked," explained Cooley. "It was the story itself. The mere printing of a thing has nothing to do with the right or wrong, the justice or injustice, the honesty or dishonesty of it."

"Do you know how much money I've spent for advertising in the *Sun* in the last fifteen years?" Peters demanded. "Nearly a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

He looked at Cooley as if expecting the young editor to gasp with amazement. Instead, Cooley said,

"Well, what did you think you were buying—advertising or public sidewalks?"

"Another thing I don't like about the *Sun* is this idea that the street-car company ought to reduce fares to five cents down here," Peters continued.

"I don't see how that concerns you," said Cooley. "I should think you'd want fares reduced. If people didn't have to spend so much on street-cars, they could spend more for clothes."

"But you don't understand," Peters told him. "The street-car company is having an awfully hard time. It was reorganized three years ago, absorbed two small lines, and issued a half-million dollars of new stock, and it's just beginning to pay dividends on that capital when you come along and threaten to wipe out its profits. Then, you're making a lot of fuss about the gambling-houses, too, and getting the church people all stirred up. The mayor has had to close the houses up-town, and now you want him to close them down here."

"Don't you think people would buy more food and clothing if they didn't use so much gambling?" asked Cooley.

"That's not the point," protested Peters. "Gambling-houses make a live town. Traveling men and farmers and people from the small towns like to come to a place where they can have some fun after tending to their business. If you stop gambling, you keep those people away, and thereby drive away trade. Furthermore, the street-car company owns the park, and gets a good profit on the gambling-privileges."

"I don't believe vice makes business," Cooley said, "in spite of the popular opinion in Prairie City to the contrary; but you're getting away from the subject. I'm interested in this street-railway stock. I suppose it was sold for cash—real money—that was used to lay new track, buy new cars, equipment and so forth?"

"Well, no, it wasn't," replied Peters. "It was just issued."

"Oh, it was 'just issued'—the company didn't get any money for it?"

"No. It was like this: You see, the old company was a foreign concern, and had been criticized a good deal, so the new management thought it would be a good idea to get in some influential local people."

"So they just passed a half-million dollars of stock round among a few of the most prominent men free of charge?"

"Yes; that was it. Of course the interest and influence of the local business men was considered the equivalent of five hundred thousand dollars in value to the company."

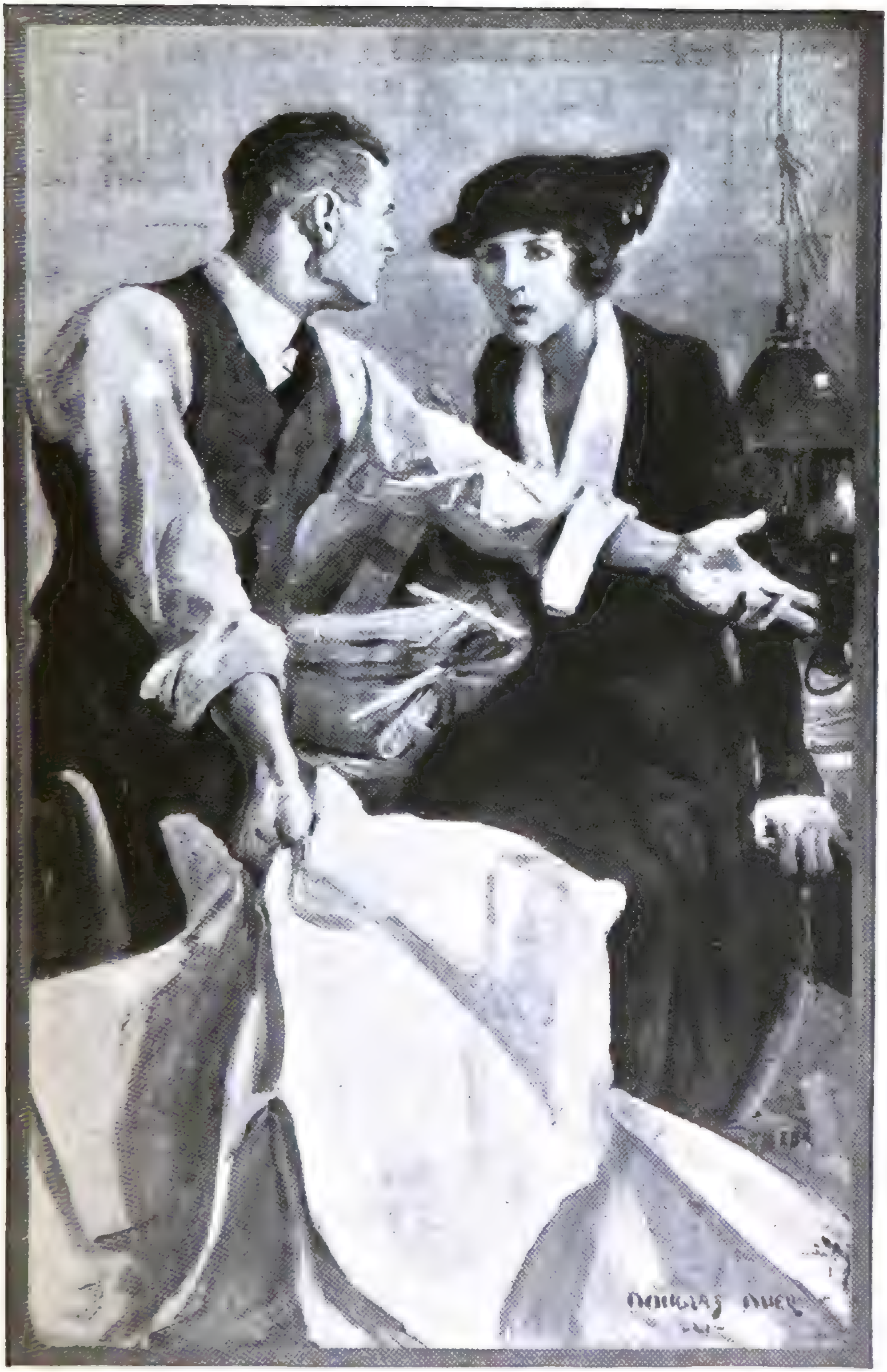
"IN OTHER words," Cooley stated, "they saddled a debt of half a million on the company, for which they received nothing, and now propose to make the people of Prairie City pay dividends on it. And you're so anxious to get your little profit out of it that you're willing to take the blood-money of a gambler who whacks up profits with the company, and to hold up the working man's wife and children, who have no place to go but here for recreation."

"I don't consider it blood-money," protested Peters. "It's business. You'll never get another inch of space from the Peters Clothing Company unless you stop attacking us and the street-car company. Thank the Lord I haven't got any contract! I can quit you whenever I want to, and I want to right now. I'm through with you."

"Well, I'm not through with you," Cooley told him. "I'm going to block off your regular advertising space to-morrow and tell the people of Prairie City just why you quit."

Peters rose and started away from the the editor, but turned when he had taken only a few steps, shook his fist toward the figure on the bench and declared,

"I'm not the only one who's quitting, either."



"No, it's a lie!" cried Cooley. "I thought it was true and started to print it; but just found out it isn't. I stopped the press just in time."

Cooley was in no mood to enjoy the rest of the vaudeville performance, so he went back to the theatre only long enough to excuse himself for the remainder of the evening from his party, and then walked over to a lonely path along the lake, beyond the lights of the park, to think out his problems. In the mean time Jack Dutton, who had found the vaudeville a bore, slipped out on the excuse of a headache and encountered Phil Perkins on the exact spot where Peters and Cooley had parted.

"HELLO Jack!" said Perkins, rising from the bench on which he had just seated himself. "Have you seen Henry Cooley around here anywhere? I understand he's looking for me."

"He's around somewhere," Dutton replied; "but I'm looking for you myself. Think I've had a change of luck. Prepare to lose your shirt."

Perkins shook his head.

"No more," he said.

"Not quitting, are you?" asked Dutton.

"No; but you are."

Dutton looked at him in surprise.

"You run an open game, don't you?"

"I run Phil Perkins' game. It's open or closed, on his hunch."

"What's your hunch this time?"

"That you've lost enough money."

Dutton held up a roll of bills.

"Whose money is this?" he asked.

"Mine—if you play long enough."

Dutton looked at him keenly.

"What's on your mind, Phil?" he asked. "I've never hollered, have I? It's a square game, isn't it?"

"The wheel's on the level, Jack, and you're a game loser, but Phil Perkins' tables are closed to you from now on."

"Somebody's been knocking me?"

"Nobody's been knocking you—except you, and you've done your own knocking." Perkins paused and looked at Dutton with an expression of the greatest friendliness. "Jack," he continued, "you know I'm a square gambler, don't you?"

"Go on," said Dutton, his face hardening.

"Well, I want the folks who play my games to be square, too. You are not."

Dutton crushed the roll of bills in his fist and drew back his arm as if to strike.

"By God," he cried, "you take that back or I'll——"

"There, there, now, Jack; hold your temper," said Perkins. "You've been square with me, but—you haven't been square with Henry Cooley and your sister."

"Now I *know* somebody's been talking to you about me!"

"No, Jack; nobody's said a word to me. They didn't need to, for I know what's square and what's crooked. Take it from me as a starter, Jack, that Cooley editor is a square guy."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Dutton in amazement. "I didn't think he was any particular friend of yours."

"He isn't. He's one of my most amiable enemies, but he's on the level. What's more, the dope he's trying to put across in this town is on the level, too. He's closed my houses up-town, and now he's trying to run me out down here, and I'll beat him to the turn if I can; but just the same he's a square guy—and I'm going to fight him square."

"What have I got to do with it?" Dutton demanded.

"A lot. People are beginning to talk about your gambling. Pretty soon they'll say your sister sicked Cooley on to me for your sake. That'll get 'em both in bad on a fluke, and you'll be responsible. It isn't square—and I won't let you do it."

Dutton hung his head in shame as he remembered his lightly given promise to his sister Alice, and a sense of humiliation came over him when he realized that but for the code of honor of a professional gambler he would have broken his word.

"You're right, Phil," he said, "and I apologize, but it's a rummy thing just the same. Can you copper it? A gambler, down for the count, asking a square deal for the fellow who's waiting to soak him when he gets up!"

"He fights fair, Jack," replied Perkins, "and any man who fights fair gets a fair fight out of Phil Perkins. And there's one more thing I want to ask you: Do you know how much money you've lost in my houses during the past year?"

"About ten thousand," answered Dutton.

"A shade less," Perkins said; "and that's a lot of money for a young fellow to have around loose in his pockets. I didn't realize it was so much until to-day, when I went over my reports and figured it up. Where did you get it, Jack?"

"Where do flies go in the winter?"

"Maybe some of them go to jail."

Dutton laughed.

"So that's it, is it?" he asked. "You think I've been tapping the bank?"

"Not at all; only——"

"Do you want to know where I got it?"

"Yes."

"I got it—where I got it," Dutton replied, and, with a care-free laugh, left the gambler and returned to the theatre.

HENRY COOLEY, who had not found any relief from solitude, returned just as Dutton departed and noticed Perkins, who had resumed his seat on the bench.

"Ah, the corrupter of public morals!" said Cooley, waving his hand to Perkins.

"The purity editor!" retorted the gambler, rising.

"Sheared any lambs this evening?" Cooley asked.

"Saved any souls to-day?" countered Perkins.

"No; but I've damned a few, if you'd take their word for it."

"Infringing my copyright," said Perkins.

"Then I've got the advantage of you—you'll never touch mine."

"Understand you want to see me."

"About a minute," Cooley told him. "I want you to make young Dutton quit gambling. I've never asked anything of you before——"

"You didn't need to ask this."

"Why?" Cooley inquired.

"The trick was turned before you played."

"Who asked you to do it?"

"Phil Perkins."

Cooley held out his hand.

"Perkins, you're a square man," he said. "I wish you were working the same side of the street with me."

"I am, in my own way," replied Perkins. "My game's just as straight as your newspaper."

"I know it is; but it's still a game."

"Is there anything that isn't?"

"Not much; but I believe there's going to be. For one thing, I believe business in this town is going to be straight before I quit the newspaper game."

"You'll quit soon if I can help any," said Perkins.

"Thanks for your good wishes," Cooley said, bowing; "so will you."

"That advertising bunch will get you and they won't get me. They have to have me in their business. And I'll help 'em get you."

"When I get through with you," said Cooley pleasantly, "you'll be looking for a job dealing stud in Denver."

"Believe me, I'm some stud-dealer."

Cooley smiled amiably. He could not—and he felt no wish to—deny a very real liking and curious respect for this man whom he was striving so vigorously to destroy.

"Seriously, Perkins," he said, "you understand about Jack Dutton. He——"

Perkins grinned.

"Sure I understand about him—and about all the members of his family, too."

Thus they parted, Cooley with more hope and higher spirits then he had possessed for several days; but his evening was not yet over. On the theatre steps he found Milton Stanberry waiting for him.

"I'm sorry to intrude upon an evening of pleasure," said the merchant, as Cooley came up to him, "but there's a very important matter which a few of us would like to discuss with you, and we feel that it cannot wait. Mr. Walker has an office down here, and although he has been called back to the city, we have arranged to use it. Will you come over?"

"Certainly," Cooley replied.

No word was spoken during the short trip to Walker's office, where Cooley found Willis, Peters and Bowers waiting for them.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said he. "Lakeside Park seems to be harboring a distinguished gathering to-night. Ten-cent car-fares apparently hold no terrors for you."

"We have been delegated to see you about that very thing," Stanberry said, seating himself at Walker's desk while the others took chairs round it.

"And about some other things, perhaps," added Bowers.

"We want to know," Stanberry began, "what is really the matter with you and the *Sun*. We want to find out what it is that, down at bottom, you want. Your conduct is so strange, the things you publish so inexplicable that we have been delegated by the Retail Merchants' Association to interview you, get your reasons. Why are you always trying to raise the devil about something or somebody?"

"While I question the accuracy of your description of our policy," Cooley responded, "if that's what you want to call it, I have no objection to explaining that it is because something or somebody needs it."

"Well, it's got to stop," Stanberry declared. "We represent the Retail Merchants' Association, composed of the seventy leading retail establishments of Prairie City. We've not only been watching your career but each of us here present has been the object of a specific attack, and we don't like it and won't stand it any longer. Prairie City has never had that kind of newspaper, and Prairie City doesn't propose to have one now. The rank and file of the people have never paid much attention to public questions and business in Prairie City. They've been satisfied to leave those things to the better classes, knowing they would look after their interests."

"The better classes' interests or the people's interests?" Cooley asked.

"They have never been dissatisfied," continued Stanberry, ignoring the question, "until now, when, as a result of your agitation, they are beginning to think they have a right to run things. There are many symptoms of the condition I describe. This strike forced on my clerks by labor agitators is one thing, and the demand for so-called reform in the city council is another. This sort of thing must be nipped in the bud. It would hurt the town for it to go on. We hope you can see this as we see it, but we want to tell you, whether you see it or not, and have sought you out to serve notice on you that you've got to quit this agitation about the retail clerks' union, about fire-escapes on buildings, about sidewalk grabs, about interest on city deposits, about five-cent fares to this park and everything else that will hurt the reputation and prosperity of Prairie City."

Cooley's response was a surprise.

"So the rest of you gentlemen, as well as Mr. Peters, got some of that half-million of street-car stock?" he asked.

"Some of them did, and some others," said Peters; "but that's not the point. The street-car company has plans all made to put in a system of interurban lines, connecting up all the small towns in this neighborhood with Prairie City, and Walker says they won't do it if this agitation about reducing fares is kept up. We want the interurban lines built because it will mean hundreds of thousands of dollars coming into Prairie City every year."

"What have five-cent fares to the lake got to do with his interurban?" Cooley demanded.

"JUST this," explained Stanberry: "If there's an agitation going on here about rates, and especially if the company should be compelled to make a reduction, it would be impossible to finance the building of the interurban lines. Investors wouldn't subscribe to the bonds offered for the project if the company was in the middle of a rate-fight."

"So Walker is behind this?" Cooley asked. "It's he who has sicked you on to the *Sun*, because you're heavy advertisers and he thinks you can control me? And you're willing to do it because of the profits you see in the farmers coming in on the trolleys, and because you each have a little free stock in the company—were presented with it in anticipation of some such situation?"

"No; you're wrong," Stanberry replied. "We are interested because we want Prairie City to grow and become prosperous."

"Walker is bunking you," Cooley said. "The question of a ten-or a five-cent fare to the lake won't have anything to do with the question of building interurbans. If it's a sound business proposition to build the lines, they will be built."

"We've been very patient with you," Stanberry said, taking a long breath and glancing about the group at his colleagues, "but I'll put it to you once more: Will you quit all this agitation?"

"I shall not swerve one inch in the policy the *Sun* has pursued for the past year."

"You cannot realize what that means, Mr. Cooley. We represent the Retail Merchants' Association, every member of which has agreed to our plan. If you continue doing what you have been doing, all of our seventy members will stop advertising with you."

"If their action in authorizing you to try to coerce me is an indication of their idea of our relations," declared Cooley, "they ought to quit. I sell advertising—not policy or my news-columns—and advertising is the only thing they can buy."

"Do you refuse our proposition?"

"Let me see if I understand it clearly. Your proposal is that if I quit our fight for a five-cent fare to the lake, for fire-escapes on Willis's fire-trap, for the public sidewalk in front of Peters' store, for interest on the city deposits in Bowers' bank, and for decent wages and hours for your clerks—if I quit all that, you'll let bygones be bygones and give me your advertising?"

"Exactly," Stanberry said.

"All right," said Cooley, rising and picking up his hat; "take your proposition—and go to hell with it!"

He was half-way to the door when he was arrested by the unctuous voice of Bowers.

"Perhaps," said the banker, "I can add a word that will help you to see things in their true light."

Cooley whirled round and faced Bowers.

"I suppose you want to remind me that the *Sun* is hard up?"

"I doubt if I need remind you of that," Bowers replied, "but I feel it my duty to inform you, before you make such a rash decision as that just indicated, that, when you decline the entirely reasonable offer made by these generous and forgiving gentlemen, you will lose more than advertising for the *Sun*."

"What will I lose?"

Like a pistol-shot in the still little room Bowers' answer came.

"The reputation of the brother of your proprietor!"

"What do you mean?" Cooley demanded, advancing a step toward the banker, while the others leaned forward in their chairs, surprise depicted on their countenances.

"Unless you change your mind," responded Bowers, "I shall be under the painful necessity of asking the police to serve the warrant which I swore out this afternoon against John Dutton for stealing ten thousand dollars from my bank."

"What!" exclaimed Cooley, overcome for a moment by the enormity of the charge and the terrible consequences it held for the woman he loved.

"Jack Dutton has been systematically robbing me for a year and gambling the money away," continued Bowers.

He got no further before Cooley was upon him, his long, strong fingers clutching his throat and shoving him cruelly backward in his chair.

"That's a lie," Cooley cried; "a damned, dirty lie! You contemptible, thieving skunk, you made that up to threaten me, but you can't do it! I'll not be bluffed. I'll send you to the penitentiary, you hypocritical, psalm-singing crook! Tell me that's a lie."

Stanberry, Peters and Willis threw themselves on Cooley and dragged him away from the gasping banker, and Billy Kelley, chief of detectives of Prairie City, hearing the noise through the closed door, rushed in from the adjoining room, where he had been waiting until summoned, and helped restrain the enraged editor.

"I would to God I could tell you it was a lie," said Bowers, regaining his breath with difficulty, "but it's the truth, as there's a Lord in heaven!"

"I don't believe it," retorted Cooley. "Jack Dutton is as honest as sunshine. It's a game, and a fine game!" He glared at the business men, now somewhat frightened. "So this was to be the last straw, was it? I was to be hammered and browbeaten and threatened and badgered with an advertising club, and then, if I didn't give in, I was to be coerced with this rotten story about Jack Dutton! Well, you've treed the wrong coon. I'll——"

STANBERRY, Willis and Peters protested vigorously.

"I never heard of this thing till this minute," declared Stanberry.

"Nor I," said Willis.

"I swear it's news to me," Peters told him. "I'll see you in hell before I ever give you another line of advertising, and I hope this thing breaks you and smashes your damned newspaper into junk. But it's Gospel truth that I don't know any more about Dutton than you do."

"Whether this thing is true or not," Cooley told them, "I'm going to give you fellows the worst skinning anybody ever got in the columns of a newspaper. I'm going to peel your individual hides off one by one, soak them in saltpeter and hang them up where the whole wide world can see their rottenness. I'm going to tell the people of Prairie City exactly how you tried to club me by taking out your ads, how you tried to bribe me by offering to put them back and how, when both these efforts failed, you tried to assassinate me by besmirching the name of the woman I—the woman who owns the *Sun*. I'll——"

Cooley's glance rested on Billy Kelley. Slowly his excitement faded as he asked himself why Kelley was there. Finally he addressed the chief of detectives.

"What are you down here for, Billy?"

"I was waiting for word as to the whereabouts of a certain party."

"Who?"

Kelley looked inquiringly toward Bowers, who nodded his head.

"Jack Dutton," replied Kelley to Cooley's question.

Cooley crossed the room and seized Kelley by the arm.

"Billy," he said, in a tense voice, "I helped make you chief of detectives. I've done you several good turns, and you've done me a few. You've always been absolutely on the square with me. You've never lied or acted a lie. But if I ever had the truth from you in your life, I want it now. Is this straight about Jack Dutton?"

"Dead straight," answered Kelley. "I've seen the books."

Cooley stood silent for an instant, every eye in the room upon him. Then he squared his shoulders and addressed Kelley.

"Go and get your man," he said quietly.

Bowers stepped forward and spoke hesitatingly.

"As I explained a moment ago, Mr. Cooley, it might be compromised. If you would agree to be reasonable——"

"You'd withdraw your warrant, would you?" demanded Cooley. "Make up the loss by skinning your depositors, fire Dutton and say nothing about it? Well, you can't make me party to a felony."

"But this is Alice Dutton's brother," suggested Bowers.

"I don't care a damn whose brother he is," Cooley answered, striding to the door but turning with his hand on the nob and facing them. "He's a bookkeeper in a Prairie City bank. He has stolen the bank's money. He has gambled away ten thousand dollars that wasn't his. That's news, and the people of Prairie City are entitled to know it. I'm going to print it—on my first page, with big head-lines—just as I'd print it if he was Bill Smith in any other bank in any other town in the country. That's the kind of an editor I am, and that's the kind of a newspaper I'm running. Do you understand now why you can't bribe me with advertising?"

The door slammed behind him, and its reverberations, Cooley believed, sounded the end of everything in the world for him.

HENRY COOLEY and Jim Austin sat on opposite sides of Cooley's desk in the editor's office on the first floor of the *Sun* building, a room which opened off the main lobby opposite the want-ad and circulation counter. Through the open door they could see the busy force of clerks industriously at work, in ignorance of the fact that a crisis in the life of the newspaper had arrived.

"And you're actually going to print the Dutton story this afternoon?" asked Austin.

"Certainly," Cooley answered. "I wrote it myself, and nobody but Patchin, the proof-reader, the man who set it up and the make-up man knows anything about it, and I've sealed their mouths."

Austin rose, walked round the desk and laid his hand on Cooley's shoulder.

"Old man," he said, "I know this is no time for compliments or that sort of thing, but I want to tell you what a big, courageous thing you're doing."

"Thanks, old man," Cooley replied, rising and gripping Austin's hand. "I'd rather have that said of me by you than anything said by anybody else I know. It does take all the nerve I've got, even though I know it's not only the right thing but the best thing to do under the circumstances."

"I can't see it from your standpoint," Austin told him. "It's likely to kill you with Miss Dutton."

"That's what takes the nerve, Jim, but I've got to run that chance. It would be easy to yield to the temptation to leave it out, but in our business a man can seldom do the easy thing."

"You're right, Henry," said Austin sorrowfully. "The easy thing is usually the wrong thing. And that's the hell of the newspaper game—it's always harder to do the right than wrong."

Cooley leaned against the edge of his desk, crossing his legs, and Austin resumed his seat beside him.

"That's the hell of every game, my boy; only, with us it's a little more hellish because what we do is slapped into the eyes of the public every day in the year. When we make a mistake or go wrong, everybody knows it the day we do it."

"When are they going to arrest Jack?" asked Austin.

"At three o'clock, just as the bank closes," Cooley replied. "I got Kelley and Bowers to wait until then on account of the run the other day. It might have started more trouble if he'd been taken during banking-hours."

Austin drummed on the desk with nervous fingers and talked in jerky sentences.

"On the square, Henry, this has got my nerve something awful. Think of it, Henry! Here we are holding the destiny of three people in our hands—yours, Alice Dutton's and her brother's. In an hour's time a detective will walk into the Prairie City National Bank and tap Jack Dutton on the shoulder. At almost the same moment the *Sun's* press will start printing the paper containing the story. In five minutes more a home will be wrecked, a young man's career blasted, the happiness of two people sent to hell— Oh, Henry, it'll be such a smash——"

COOLEY leaned over and shook Austin by the shoulder.

"Here, here!" he commanded. "Come; don't you see it's the only way out?"

"No, I don't. Young Dutton ought to be told. Alice Dutton should be given some warning. Why, man, this is likely to drive her crazy! She worships her brother."

"Don't you suppose I considered all that, Jim? I was no sooner out of Walker's office last night than I realized I must have time to think; so I went back and arranged to have the warrant withheld until they heard from me. They were willing, because Bowers was getting cold feet awfully fast, and, of course, they thought I was weakening. Then what do you suppose I did all the rest of the night, after getting Phil Perkins' word for it and making Bowers come up-town and show me the books? I walked the streets until seven o'clock this morning. I thought at first I would go insane, and I walked and walked and walked and fought it out. I got hold of myself. I forced myself to stand off and look at the thing from a distance impersonally. I studied every angle. I found the best and only course, and I'm following it.

"I first satisfied myself that the charge was true, and then tried to find the easiest way out for Dutton and his sister. I realized it would be best if the *Sun* printed the story first, but I also realized I could not stand it to have Alice Dutton and Jack here in the office this morning while I was writing the story and arranging to get out some kind of a paper. I wanted our story, which is straightforward, simple, and as kind as possible under the circumstances, to be the first information the town gets of the case. If the *Leader* had had it this morning, or if the *Star* had had it for this afternoon, they'd certainly have gone the limit on it. They'll spread on it as a follow, anyway, but our sympathetic story will get first attention, and by the time their stories come they will create as much sympathy as condemnation."

"But why don't you tell Miss Dutton all this before it's printed?" asked Austin. "It's cruel to let her learn it first from the *Sun*, her own paper."

"It would be more cruel to let her take the responsibility—which she couldn't escape if she knew—of deciding whether to print it, and, if so, what to print. Very likely, if she knew, she'd order it suppressed and give the opposition first play on it; if she did not, if I could convince her my way was best, she would have to issue or consent to the order for blasting her brother's life. That would be asking too much of a mere human being. But she won't get the first information from the paper. I'm going to arrive there a few minutes after three o'clock with the paper and tell her."

"If we could only print the facts about the whole thing!" exclaimed Austin, with indignation. "How they tried to use Dutton's theft as a club—how——"

"Yes, I know, Jim; I've been over all that a dozen times," Cooley interrupted, "but we *can't* print that now. I told those hellions last night that I was going to skin 'em alive, and I would if it hadn't been for Dutton's case, but I realize that nobody would believe it now. Everybody, very naturally, would say we were lying to create sympathy for a thief. They would think it preposterous that Bowers offered to hush the matter up if the *Sun* would reverse its policies. They'd charge us with trying to get even. Bowers would rather have hushed it up, but when I defied them, why, of course he had to stand pat."

"Why did you do it, Henry?"

Cooley looked at his friend long and earnestly.

"You, too, Jim?" he asked. "I thought you, at least, knew me better by this time. Jim, I really believe all the things I say and try to do about honest, independent newspapers. I really believe readers have the right to know the true facts, and I wouldn't deceive them—and I wouldn't compound a felony—even for the woman I love."

The young editor turned and walked to the window. Austin was beside him instantly, his arm about his shoulders.

"Forgive me, Henry," he pleaded. "I know you wouldn't. I didn't mean it. I didn't realize what I said."

"It's all right," Cooley replied, taking Austin's proffered hand and gripping it hard; "I know you didn't."

THEY walked back to the desk and resumed their seats, after which Austin asked,

"What are you going to do about this boycott of the Retail Merchants' Association?"

"The only thing we can do," Cooley told him; "quit."

"Suspend publication?"

"There's no other answer. I've been running the *Sun* a year. I've been absolutely independent of every interest that wanted special favors—and as a result I've lost the business of every advertiser of consequence."

"But we've got the people. Our circulation has mounted to the sky. Stanberry, Willis, Peters and the others will *have* to use the paper before long."

"It would take them a year to find it out, and we're broke to-day. I've got fifteen or twenty thousand dollars of my mother's and Miss Dutton has about the same, but she won't let me use mine, and I won't let her use hers. Anyway, if we used it all, it would not be a drop in the bucket now, with this boycott on."

Austin sighed.

"It all comes down to this—doesn't it, Henry?—a newspaper can't be honest and earn its way."

"I've spent all the receipts of the *Sun* and nearly a hundred thousand dollars more in the last year, but I won't concede that yet. On the contrary, I've proved that a newspaper can do that very thing. The only trouble with the *Sun* is lack of a little more capital. If I had fifty thousand dollars, I'd make that bunch of advertisers crawl through that door on their knees and howl for mercy. But I haven't got it; I can't get it, and—I've got to lay down."

"Have you told any of the staff?"

Cooley walked round the desk and laid his hand on Austin's shoulder.

"You are the first," said he, "and I want to tell you, old man, that I'm more sorry on account of you loyal people who have stood by me than on my own. I know how it is with you, Jim. I've been watching you. She's a fine girl, and you must not let our failure interfere with your plans. You will land something—probably better than you've had here—and when you do, take her with you."

"Thanks, Henry!" said Austin. "I'll do my best, but—I've been watching you, too, old fellow, and hoping you and Miss Dutton——"

"That's all over now, Jim."

"If Alice Dutton is the woman I think she is, it won't make a bit of difference."

"But it will make a difference to me, Jim, and I think she'd *want* it to make a difference. No—no—that was a beautiful dream. But it was only a dream."

Both men were silent for several minutes, and were only roused from their thoughts, which were slipping aimlessly into the future without pilot or rudder, by the voice of the young woman who was the subject of their conversation. Cooley sprang to his feet, looked at his watch and turned to the door of his office as she entered. Austin discreetly withdrew.

"Why, I thought you were—I thought you were not coming down this afternoon!" stammered Cooley, as Miss Dutton entered and helped herself to a chair.

"I couldn't stay away," she replied. "There are so many things I want to talk to you about."

"I told you I was coming out at three o'clock, sure, and asked you to be there."

"I know it; but I couldn't remain alone. I'm so upset over the boycott and suspending publication that I couldn't keep still in that big house."

"You must stay at home—you must not—" began Cooley excitedly.

"Must not what?" she asked.

"I mean you must conserve your strength. The strain will be terrible for you the next few days."

"Why, Mr. Cooley," exclaimed Alice Dutton, with surprise, "you talk as if this was some frightful tragedy! Really, I don't mind it at all. Why, I don't care any more for my hundred thousand than a snap of my fingers. I know the money has been spent in an honest endeavor to test an honest principle. It so happens that I didn't have quite enough to make the test a financial success, but, nevertheless, the test has been valuable. It has done great things for Prairie City; it has helped thousands of people to be happier; it has taught a lot of old fogies right and decency—even though they have not yet quite learned it. It will go down in the history of journalism as an achievement. I am proud of the part I have had in it. I shall never regret a minute of it or wish to have back a cent of my fortune. I'm proud to have given *you* the chance to put your theories into practise, and I know I have merely furnished you a foundation upon which you will work to success elsewhere as the pioneer exponent of independent journalism."

THE editor leaned over the desk toward his employer with his soul in his eyes.

"It is sweet—and bitter—to hear you say that," he said, "and I want you to remember always, no matter what happens—no matter what may occur to make you think differently of me—that I've been absolutely on the square with every line ever printed in the Prairie City *Sun*."

"I know that," said Miss Dutton softly.

"I want you to tell yourself, in the days to come, that every story I ever printed went into the paper because I honestly believed it ought to be printed and because I believed—no; I knew—that in the end the rightness of my course would be justified."

"How strange you seem!" murmured Miss Dutton, puzzled at his attitude. "I don't understand. I need no assurances of your honesty of purpose."

"I just want you to remember what I say—that's all," said Cooley; "and now, before you go——"

"Before I go?" she said, with surprise. "Why, I hadn't said a word about going. I believe you're trying to get rid of me."

"Not at all," replied Cooley; "but I do feel you should rest and prepare yourself for the strain of the next few days. But I was going to show you my notice of suspension of publication."

He handed her a single sheet of typewritten paper, which she picked up and started to read.

"'Valedictory.' I don't like that, to start with. It's too highbrow."

> I desire to announce the suspension of publication of the Prairie City *Sun*. This issue is its last. The policies of the *Sun*, vigorously pursued for the past year, have been such as to alienate a majority of the advertisers of Prairie City, who have shown their disapproval by withdrawing their business. This has made necessary the expenditure of all of the paper's receipts and a large sum of money besides. While convinced of the justice and wisdom of those policies, I feel that investment of further capital to establish them would not be justifiable.
>
> I desire to thank those advertisers who have not allowed selfishness to blind them to the broad, progressive ideals upon which the *Sun* has been conducted and who have continued to give us their business.
>
> I also desire to thank the thousands of people of Prairie City who have shown their appreciation of the newspaper's purposes by buying and reading it. My chief regret in closing the paper is that by so doing I take from them an agency of public expression which they sorely need.
>
> HENRY M. COOLEY, Editor.

Miss Dutton let the paper fall to the desk before her and gazed out of the window.

"What do you think of it?" Cooley asked.

"I guess it will do," she replied, sighing. "I don't suppose it makes any difference what kind of obituary you have after you're dead. Frankly, I don't like it. I can hardly believe you wrote it. It's too wishy-washy, namby-pamby. Why don't you hit them? You ought to smash them between the eyes. I thought you'd go down in a blaze of glory, shouting defiance at the top of your voice, dying as you fought—head up and fist clenched."

"This time," said Cooley, "I believe the other way is better. Won't you trust me in this?"

"I'll trust you in anything," Miss Dutton told him, with tears trembling in her eyes.

"Thank you," he replied, and then rose and looked hastily at his watch. "Please go straight home," he urged; "I'll be there at three o'clock."

Miss Dutton walked to the door, paused, turned half round and said, with a smile:

"I'll be there. I—I—I *want* you to come." Cooley looked after her soberly, even the delicious, becoming blush which spread over her beautiful face failing to bring anything but misery into his eyes.

AFTER Alice Dutton had left him, Cooley started mechanically to go through his desk, sorting out papers and letters preparatory to the closing of the *Sun* the next day, but he made little headway. He looked at his watch every few minutes, got up and walked through the lobby to the door of the press-room, where he knew the heavy semicylindrical plates containing the story about Jack Dutton were being clamped to the cylinders of the giant press, watched the pressmen, ignorant of the dynamite they were handling, at their work, returned to his office and suffered the agonies of a condemned man living through his last fatal hour. When he felt as if his nerves would snap and his head burst as he watched the minute-hand of his watch crawl with amazing speed toward the figure "3," he heard a quick step and a familiar voice outside. He stepped to the door and encountered Phil Perkins.

"What do you want?" Cooley demanded.

"I've come to apologize and make a retraction."

"Out with it!" snapped Cooley.

"Jack Dutton never stole a cent from——"

Cooley grabbed him by the arm.

"What?" he cried.

"I thought he did when I told you so; but he didn't."

"Are you telling the truth now?"

"On my word."

Cooley jerked out his watch, and at the same instant the rumble of the press, starting the afternoon run of the *Sun*, reverberated through the room.

"Stand right where you are!" Cooley ordered Perkins, and ran to the door of the press-room and jerked it open. "Stop that press!" he yelled to the pressman. "Don't let one of those papers get out of the office." Whirling round toward the counter across the room, behind which Austin sat at his desk, he cried: "Jim, get every paper in there and keep them safe! Don't let one get out of the building!"

Cooley rushed back into his office and snatched up the telephone, while Perkins waited wonderingly in his doorway.

"Don't go, Phil," he said to the gambler. Then he poured a stream of words into the telephone. "Give me Mr. Patchin—quick. Hello, Patchin? Kill that Dutton story! D'ye hear? . . . Yes; I've stopped the press. Get the type yourself and throw it in the metal pot and see that it's melted. Burn the copy and proofs. Get the printer who set it up, the proof reader and the make-up man into a room and lock 'em up. Hold 'em till you hear from me. Don't let one of them get away or reach a telephone. Make over the first page. Put in anything —I don't care what—and rush it down as quick as you can."

Jamming the receiver on the hook, Cooley whirled upon Perkins, dragged him into his office, called to Austin to come, too, and put the gambler through a rapid-fire series of questions. Austin laid on his own desk the few copies of the *Sun* which had been printed before the press was stopped, and joined them.

"Now, talk fast!" commanded Cooley. "What's this you say?"

"Jack Dutton gambled away ten thousand dollars at my houses, but it was his own money, a secret inheritance from his father."

"I saw his books at the bank," said Cooley. "They showed a shortage."

"I saw them, too. That's why I told you the charge was true."

"How do you know now it was a lie?" demanded Cooley.

"Bowers changed the books himself. I made him confess. I——"

"Bowers did that?" exclaimed the editor. "I can hardly believe it."

"The damned old hound!" put in Austin.

Perkins explained:

"I've known Jack Dutton since he was a boy, and I couldn't believe he was a thief, even after I'd seen the evidence. This afternoon I went to Bowers and had it out. I laid down on him, and he owned up. He's damn near crazy——"

Cooley was transformed. His fighting spirit was back. His eyes glowed with the lust of battle.

"He'll be clear crazy," he snapped, "when I get through with him! I'm going to put his rotten old carcass in stripes. You watch me—I'm in the clear at last—nothing to stop me—I'll blow this whole damned gang higher than the stars to-night in an extra this town will remember a thousand years from now." He turned to Austin. "Jim, 'phone Miss Dutton I'm delayed and will see her later, and if anybody wants me, I'm up-stairs beating the insides out of a typewriter."

With a bound, Cooley was out of the room, and an instant later Austin and Perkins heard him go up-stairs three steps at a time. Bowers' plot to ruin Jack Dutton and, through him, Cooley and the *Sun*, and the fact that it had been discovered in the nick of time not only freed Cooley's hands to expose the whole story of attempted coercion but put in his possession a scandal that was bound to bring universal condemnation upon the whole undertaking and rouse universal sympathy for Alice Dutton, Cooley, the newspaper and the policies for which it stood. Now, indeed, Cooley could go down in a blaze of glory, dying as he had fought, and before he was half-way up-stairs to the editorial rooms, the story he would write began shaping itself in his mind. His opening sentence was at the tip of his fingers as he burst into the city room, dragged a chair to a battered desk, picked up a slab of copy-paper, slipped a sheet quickly into a typewriter and began to make the keys hum while Patchin and the staff looked on in amazement.

"Get ready for an extra," Cooley called over his shoulder to Patchin, "a hell of an extra!"

Down-stairs, Austin walked over to Phil Perkins and thrust out his hand.

"Perkins," he said, "you've saved Henry Cooley's reason, a boy's reputation, a girl's good name, two loving hearts—say, Phil; how the devil did you happen to do it?"

"Can't a man be on the square and still be a gambler?" he demanded.

"But we've been hammering you so hard, I'd have thought you'd let this go."

"That Cooley fellow's a damn fool," replied Perkins; "he doesn't know when he's well off, but he's a square guy and he's running a square newspaper. He took that Dutton story partly on my say-so, and I thought too much of my word to keep still."

"You may have put your gambling-houses on the bum, and you've thrown down the people supposed to be your friends," said Austin; "but I want to tell you it's the straightest thing I ever heard of. I want to thank you."

Perkins shook hands with him solemnly. "Cut out the gratitude thing," he said; "it isn't coming to me. I did it for Phil Perkins."

AT THIS moment, Susan Gregg, who had witnessed Cooley's dramatic entrance into the city room, and was mystified at his delight and excitement, tripped hastily down-stairs to find out from Austin what it was all about. Observing that he was not at his desk, but seeing a pile of fresh papers lying upon it, she passed behind the counter, picked up a paper and came back to the front of the want-ad counter to look at it just as Alice Dutton, despite her promise to go home, strolled into the lobby through the front door, arriving beside Susan in time to hear that young lady exclaim,

"Jack Dutton arrested!"

"Jack arrested!" cried his sister, swaying for a moment and turning as white as her fresh summer dress. "What for? What do you mean? Give me that paper!" She snatched the paper from Susan's hands, read the head-lines and crumpled against the counter. "Where's Mr. Cooley?" she gasped.

Susan Gregg ordered a frightened clerk to run up-stairs and fetch Cooley.

"Jack!" muttered Alice Dutton, brokenly and miserably. "Jack—a thief! It can't be true—it can't be! But he wouldn't print anything that wasn't— Oh, my brother, my own, dear brother—Jack—in my own newspaper!"

Cooley saw her distress and heard her cries as he ran down-stairs.

"Hell!" he roared at Susan, who held the paper crushed in her hand. "Where'd you get that?"

"Don't 'hell' me!" cried the young society reporter. "Is it true?"

"No, it's a lie!" cried Cooley. "I thought it was true and started to print it, but just found out it isn't." He touched Alice's hand gently. "It isn't true," he told her. "I stopped the press just in time."

"It isn't true?" asked Alice dazedly.

"No," Cooley replied; "it's all a lie—made up by Bowers. Forgive me; I didn't mean for you to know until I could explain, but I can't stop now. Please wait a little while; I'll be right back."

With an appealing look at Susan to comfort his employer, Cooley started back for the stairs on the run. At the second leap upward, he paused and turned round.

"That's what I wanted to see you about at three o'clock," he said; "that's the reason I couldn't skin those fellows for boycotting us. That's the reason I wanted you to stay at home. But it's all right now, and I'm getting out an extra that will send Bowers to the penitentiary and make that gang of cutthroats wish they'd never been born. I'm going to cut 'em wide open and let the people see their black hearts. We're going out of business, but we'll be here long enough to put that church-deacon banker behind the bars!"

He vanished up-stairs, and Alice Dutton and Susan Gregg turned to each other.

"Susan!" cried Alice, throwing her arms round the younger woman.

"Alice!" exclaimed Susan, embracing her friend.

Then Alice saw Phil Perkins standing in the doorway of Cooley's office, an amused grin on his face.

"Oh, I didn't realize there was anybody here," she said to Susan.

"No apology needed, ma'am," said the gambler. He approached the two women hesitatingly. "I'm Phil Perkins; I know the whole story."

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Perkins?" Alice said. "I don't think we ever met before."

"If you'll let a rough old gambler say a word to you, miss, he'd like to do it," said Perkins.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Perkins," she replied. "What is it?"

"That Cooley fellow—he's a square guy—and he runs a square paper."

"I know that, Mr. Perkins. He—he would have printed that story—about my brother, knowing it would nearly kill me."

"It took a lot of nerve," observed Perkins.

Alice Dutton turned away from them for a moment. Perkins and Susan watched her in silence. After a moment, she looked at them with misty eyes.

"How did he discover the story wasn't true?" she asked.

"A friend tipped him off," Perkins replied.

"What friend?" Miss Dutton demanded, but Perkins remained silent.

"I'll bet I know," exclaimed Susan.

"Was it you?" inquired Miss Dutton.

"Yes, ma'am; but that wasn't anything. I'd told him the story was straight. I'd seen the books and believed it, although I hated to. When I found it was a frame-up, I rushed right over here and was just in time for him to head off the paper."

"I didn't know you were particularly fond of the *Sun*," said Miss Dutton.

"I'm not; but I'm fond of my word."

Alice Dutton rushed up to Perkins.

"Mr. Perkins," she asked, "will you shake hands with me? That was the finest thing I ever knew of anybody doing. I want to thank you—for myself, for my brother, and for—for Mr. Cooley."

"I'm proud to shake hands with you, miss," Perkins replied, with embarrassment, "but I didn't do anything to deserve thanks."

"What Miss Dutton says goes double," Susan said, striding to the gambler and shaking hands also. "I'm proud to shake hands with a real man."

"I'm doubly proud," said Perkins, bowing to both.

THIS was the tableau presented to Henry Cooley, who at that moment came downstairs like a boy on the last day of school, the stub of a cigar between his lips, his hair rumpled, his coat off, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, and carrying in one hand a half-dozen sheets of typewritten copy-paper. He glanced toward the group with a smile, and was hurrying to his office when he was amazed to see the figure of Milton K. Stanberry enter through the street door, a good-sized roll of paper in his hand.

"I want to see you," said the merchant, with grim expression, halting just inside the room, addressing Cooley and ignoring the presence of Miss Dutton, Susan Gregg and Perkins.

"Talk fast," replied Cooley. "This is my busy day."

Stanberry unrolled the paper, which proved to be an enormous sheet covered with printed letters, large figures and miniature pictures of innumerable articles sold by the Stanberry Stores pasted among the other symbols.

"You've always got time to take an ad, haven't you?" he asked.

"Always," said Cooley. "What's this?"

"Double page for to-morrow."

"It's only fair to tell you before accepting it that I'm getting out an extra right now that's going to roast the tar out of you."

"I didn't say there were any strings to it, did I?" Stanberry demanded.

"What's the answer?" Cooley shot at him.

"I know when I'm licked. You've got the people of this town crazy about your wild ideas, and they're all reading your paper. I can't reach 'em unless I put my advertising there, too."

"How about your strike?"

"Settled it this morning, and that's another reason I'm coming back with my business. I've been practically boycotted by the public since you took up the cause of my clerks, but now that I've accepted their terms, put them back to work, and shown my advertising in the *Sun*, the public will come back."

"How about a new contract?"

"Bring it around—I'll sign."

"Roast or no roast?"

Stanberry laid his advertising copy down on the counter and started for the door, where he turned and said:

"I don't care a rap what you put in your paper. I'm simply going to ignore it and devote myself to advertising."

BEFORE the shock of Stanberry's capitulation had passed, and while the editor, the young women and Austin, who had arrived a few moments before, were gazing at each other in unbelief, another surprising visitor came in. Harvey Willis entered, with much the same expression on his face as that worn by Stanberry, and walked directly up to Cooley.

"Mr. Cooley," he said, "I've been thinking over what you said to me in the bank the other day and I've concluded I was wrong. I never thought before about a newspaper's obligation to its readers—to the public; but now I see your view-point, and I want to apologize—to ask your pardon for misunderstanding you. Will you shake hands and begin all over?"

Cooley took Willis's hand.

"How about the fire-escapes?" he asked.

"I let the contract for them this morning. You were right about that, too."

"Then we're even," said Cooley heartily, as he shook hands, "and I'll be glad to call it quits."

"I'm ready to sign that contract."

"I'll be over and fix it up in the morning."

Willis started for the door, and Cooley walked beside him.

"Sure there are no hard feelings?" asked the former, as he was about to leave.

"Not the slightest," Cooley told him. "And you?"

"Same here," replied Willis. "Good-by."

Cooley turned to the two young women.

"Girls," he exclaimed, "do you know what that means?"

They seized Cooley's hands, one on either side, and whirled him round the room in a crazy dance, while Perkins and Austin looked on amusedly, and the clerks behind the counter rose from their desks and stared in amazement. Their frolic was interrupted, however, by another unexpected caller.

"I beg your pardon," said Judson Peters, surprised by this scene in a business office.

Miss Dutton and Susan broke away and clung to each other on one side of the room while Cooley advanced to meet the merchant.

"I beg yours," he said. "We were just celebrating over—over a little surprise. What can I do for you?"

"You said last night you were going to print a story," said Peters, "about me and the street-car company, and about the merchants boycotting the *Sun*, and about Jack Dutton."

"That's what I said," Cooley replied.

"Well, I've reconsidered. You can have my business."

"Why this change of heart?"

"If I give you my advertising, you can't make the public believe I'm trying to control you by withholding it, can you?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I'm giving it to you."

"What about your sidewalk grab?"

"That's all off," Peters told him. "I've ordered my architect to change the plans."

"I want you to understand I reserve the right to criticize you whenever I think it's coming to you."

"Print anything about me you've a mind to. It won't get by with the public as long as I'm giving you my full line of copy."

"You've never been under contract with the *Sun*," Cooley reminded him, "and could change your mind again to-morrow. Will you make a year's contract now?"

"Sure! The same space as I give the *Star* and *Leader*. Come in to-morrow and I'll sign up."

As Peters disappeared through the door, Alice Dutton rushed over to Cooley and grasped his hand in both of hers.

"We're saved! We're saved!" she cried. "We won't have to suspend!"

"That's just what I'm worrying about," Cooley replied soberly. "If they're coming back into the paper merely because they're afraid of trouble over that plot against Jack, we'll have to refuse their business and expose them."

"I hadn't thought about that," said Miss Dutton. "But Mr. Willis talked as if he honestly meant what he said, and Stanberry certainly spoke with conviction. I think maybe he's discovered that he *must* use the *Sun.* He's been having an awful time since his clerks struck. It's as you say, though: if they're coming back only from fear on account of their dastardly attempt to ruin Jack, we can't—take—their advertising—and we'll—have to—suspend publication."

Into this gloom, so suddenly descended upon them, strode Theodore Walker, who walked directly up to Cooley.

"I want that run to-morrow in good position, next to reading-matter," said Walker, slapping a sheet of paper down in front of the editor.

"What's this?" asked Cooley, picking up the paper.

"An advertisement announcing five-cent fares to the lake," responded Walker.

"Accept my congratulations."

"They're not in order. If a public-service corporation is wise, it will reduce rates just ahead of the hue and cry—and get the reputation of being progressive and benevolent. You wouldn't like anything better than for us to fight you for a year, would you? And when we finally had to make the reductions, you'd claim all the credit for it?"

"We would if it were coming to us," replied Cooley.

"Well, we're beating you to it—see?" declared Walker, thumping the counter with his fist. "The joke is on you this time. I've queered your little game. And we're going to build those interurbans, too. Send down a reporter; it's a good story."

Before Cooley could reply to Walker, Phil Perkins came over to them.

"There was one thing I forgot to tell you, Cooley," he said. "Nobody but Bowers was in on that Jack Dutton deal."

"Is that on the level?" demanded Cooley, turning quickly to the gambler.

"I *know* it," Perkins replied. "We were all as surprised as you were."

Cooley looked with relief at Miss Dutton.

"That lets us out," he said, and, to Austin, "Jim, tell Patchin to kill that extra."

"Now we won't have to skin 'em alive, will we?" asked Miss Dutton.

"Nobody but Bowers," he replied. "We'll send him to jail."

"Nothing doing," put in Perkins. "He's all in. I don't believe he'll live a week."

Alice turned to Cooley and spoke with compassion.

"Don't you think, Mr. Cooley, that we could afford, under the circumstances, to drop the case against Mr. Bowers? He alone was responsible; his terrible plot was discovered in time; nothing is known, and nothing will be known about it by the public. My brother and I are the ones who have been wronged. If we are willing to say nothing and do nothing, you should be."

"I'll agree to that on condition that Bowers completely severs his connection with the Prairie City National Bank," said Cooley.

"He'll agree all right," asserted Perkins.

MANY and surprising as the events of the day had been, there was still one more in store for the young publishers of the Prairie City *Sun.* As Walker and Perkins were on the point of leaving, Stanberry, Willis and Peters returned. Willis acted as spokesman.

"As a majority of the Board of Directors of the Retail Merchants' Association," he announced, "we've come to inform you that the boycott declared against you last night is off. As long as the biggest advertisers of the organization have composed their differences and are going to do business with you, we don't see how the association can officially cut you off. We've decided that a controversy between a newspaper and its advertisers is a bad thing for the town. We want peace."

"Gentlemen, I am delighted to have this assurance of support," said Cooley, "but I wish to have it definitely understood that the Prairie City *Sun* reserves the right to speak out, openly and vigorously, at all times on all public questions, whether or not they affect any particular advertiser or interest. We want your advertising, but we want it as advertising, not as a bribe."

"That's understood and agreed to," Willis responded.

Suddenly an uproar floated down-stairs to the ears of the group assembled in the business office. Yells, kicking on a door and pounding could be heard. Cooley suddenly remembered the printers and proofreader whom Patchin had locked up.

"I'll have to ask you to excuse me now, gentlemen," he said, smiling and looking toward the stairway, "while I calm the wild beasts." At the foot of the stairs he stopped and turned. "I feel that a new era has dawned in Prairie City," said he. "From now on I think I can predict a redeemed and regenerated journalism, and a broader, more human, more prosperous business life. My own appreciation I want to express in substantial manner, which will be plainly understood by two of those present if not by all." He looked toward Austin and Susan. "Jim, your salary is increased ten dollars a week beginning today." Then he disappeared up-stairs.

The *Sun's* callers departed with mingled feelings of relief and indignation. Austin and Susan approached Alice Dutton hand in hand.

"Miss Dutton, I—we—I—" Austin began.

"Save your blushes and your explanations," laughed the happy young woman. "Don't waste them on me. I'm not deaf, dumb and blind."

"Jim wants to do it right away," protested Susan.

"So much the better," said Alice.

"Us for the ring and the license before she changes her mind," Austin said, taking his *fiancée* by the arm and starting to the door.

"But, Jim," she protested, "I'm not dressed—I haven't any coat or wrap—I can't— What will people say?"

"I'm taking no chances," Austin replied, and hustled her out of the office.

QUITTING-TIME had finally arrived and the clerks in the want-ad and circulation departments—all but one, who remained for emergency duty—left the building. Alice Dutton strolled into Cooley's office and seated herself at his desk, opposite his chair. She sighed deeply and smiled happily as she looked about the little room which, for a year, had held so many of his hopes and fears and struggles and problems. Suddenly she caught her breath as she heard Cooley's step. He was running down-stairs, humming happily an old, old song:

"Sweet bunch of daisies, brought from the dell—
Kiss me once, darling; daisies won't tell.
Give me your promise; oh, sweetheart, do!
Darling, I love ——"

She heard the song cease abruptly, and knew that Cooley had reached the office and was surprised to find it deserted. Getting up quickly, she slipped behind a tall screen which concealed a wash-stand in the corner of the room.

Cooley stepped quickly into the room and then stopped suddenly. Alice could feel his disappointment at not finding her there. Then she heard him sit at his desk, take down the telephone-receiver and call the number of her home. In a moment he spoke.

"Hello, hello! Is this you, Annie? This is Mr. Cooley. I think Miss Dutton is on her way home. When she arrives, please tell her I am on my way out."

Cooley's back was toward the screen, so he did not see the mischievous eyes that peeped at him while he used the telephone. Neither did he know he was under observation when he picked up from his blotter a single typewritten sheet of paper and began reading aloud to himself:

> "I desire to announce the suspension of publication of the Prairie City *Sun*. This issue is its last. The policies of the *Sun* ——"

His first knowledge that he was not alone came when a slender white hand reached over his shoulder, took the sheet of paper from his fingers and started crumpling it up into a ball, when a faint, delicate scent penetrated to his very soul and a tendril of soft brown hair brushed his cheek and sent a wave of feeling from his head to his feet. He turned half round in his chair, looked hungrily into Alice Dutton's tenderly sweet face bending over him, raised his hands and cupped her adorable head in his palms and whispered:

"Alice, I can say it now. I love you."

For a moment she let herself float away on the tide of love surging from his eyes, and then gave him his answer:

"I love you, Henry."

A Bill *of* Divorcement

A Strong and Moving Drama on a Subject That Just Now Is Greatly Agitating the Conservative Element of British Society. But Its Appeal to Human Sympathy Is World-Wide

By Clemence Dane

Published by courtesy of the author, the producer, Charles H. Dillingham, and the publisher, The Macmillan Company

IT IS Christmas morning of the year 1933. The hall of the Fairfields' home in an English village is hung with holly and mistletoe. *Miss Hester Fairfield* and *Margaret,* her nephew's wife, are at breakfast.

Eighteen years ago, when *Margaret* was seventeen, she was swept into marriage on the tide of the great war. Before her daughter, *Sydney,* was born, her husband, *Hilary Fairfield,* became a victim of shell-shock, and since then has been in a hospital for the insane, his condition accounted hopeless.

One year ago *Margaret* divorced him, taking advantage of the new liberal divorce laws. On New Year's day she is to marry *Gray Meredith.*

AUNT HESTER: If anything could make me approve of this marriage of yours, it's that the child will have a strong hand over her at last. A stepfather's better than nothing—if you can call him a stepfather when her father's still alive.

MARGARET: Oh, I wish you didn't hate it so!

Sydney comes in presently. Her manner is brisk and decided.

She cannot be long in her aunt's presence without making the sparks fly. Invariably *Miss Fairfield* gives her a prayer-book for Christmas, so this year she bought her aunt a cigarette-case, and now suggests that they exchange.

MARGARET: Sydney dear, you mustn't—Of course your aunt knows you don't really mean to be rude——.

AUNT HESTER (*rising*): I'm afraid you'll have to go to church without me, Margaret, I'm thoroughly upset. I shall read the service in the drawing-room. (*She goes out.*)

Margaret is somewhat upset over *Sydney's* engagement to *Christopher* (*Kit*) *Pumphrey.* "You see," she says, "I thought I was in love at seventeen, too. It was the war——"

SYDNEY: How could a war make you get married if you didn't want to?

MARGARET: It was the feel in the air. One did mad things.

Gray Meredith comes in with his Christmas gifts and carries *Margaret* off to church. *Christopher Pumphrey* is with him. Kit stays behind to visit with *Sydney* and brings some news. His father, who is rector of the parish, has just learned that *Mrs. Fairfield* is a divorced woman and not a widow, as he had supposed, and he will not perform the marriage ceremony.

SYDNEY: But the divorce is perfectly legal.

KIT: Of course a clergyman needn't remarry divorced people. It's in that bill. The governor was quoting it to-day.

SYDNEY: But doesn't he know the circumstances?

KIT: He only knows what I do.

SYDNEY: One doesn't shout things at people, naturally. But it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's only that my unfortunate father's been in an asylum ever since I can remember. Shell-shock.

Aunt Hester **(Ada King) interrupts a love-scene between** ***Sydney*** **(Katharine Cornell) and** ***Kit Pumphrey*** **(John Astley) with an irrelevant observation: "Really, Sydney! Before lunch!"**

Hilary Fairfield (Allan Pollock) returns home, unexpectly cured of shell-shock after **sixteen years in an asylum, to find—what?**

KIT: Pretty tragic!

SYDNEY: Oh, he's well looked after. He's quite all right.

KIT (*uncomfortably*): You're a queer girl. Your own father——

SYDNEY (*impatiently*): My dear boy, I've never even seen him. Oh, of course, it's very sad, but I can't go about with my handkerchief to my eyes all the time, can I?

KIT (*leaning over the back of the sofa*): You little brute—you're as hard as nails.

SYDNEY (*putting up her face to him*): Am I? (*They kiss.*)

AUNT HESTER (*passing through the room*): Really, Sydney! Before lunch!

Aunt Hester has no sympathy for the young lovers and is much concerned because *Kit*, who is to take orders, does not go off to church. After she has interrupted them several times, he finally decides to do so.

Aunt Hester sits down in the hall with *Sydney* and reads her prayer-book.

Presently the telephone-bell rings. *Sydney* receives the message. A doctor from Bedford Asylum called up to say that her father has got away.

SYDNEY (*much perturbed*): Their theory is that he has suddenly come to himself. Can it happen? After sixteen years?

AUNT HESTER: It's quite possible. It does. It was the same with my poor sister, Grace. After ten years, that was.

SYDNEY (*struck*): Is that a fact about Aunt Grace? Was she out of her mind, too?

AUNT HESTER: There's something in most families.

SYDNEY: Did mother know—when she married? Insanity! A thing you can hand on! And I told Kit it was shell-shock.

AUNT HESTER: I don't see what difference it makes to Christopher. It's a question of what your mother will do.

SYDNEY: But it won't have anything to do with mother.

AUNT HESTER (*grimly*): Won't it?

SYDNEY: What on earth are you driving at?

AUNT HESTER: I can't discuss it with you. You're too young.

SYDNEY (*insolently*): I might just as well say I can't discuss it with you because you're too old.

AUNT HESTER: How dare you speak to me like that?

SYDNEY: Well, I'm sorry. But I'm so worried. Don't you see I've got to keep it off mother? Auntie, if you'd only be decent! (*But Aunt Hester has gone.*) If I only knew what to do!

Sydney flings herself down on the sofa. She lies there, trying to work out her problem in her mind. She is finally roused by the click of a latch as the French window is softly opened and *Hilary Fairfield* steps over the threshold. Something in the fashion of the empty room (for he does not see *Sydney* crouching in the cushions) disconcerts him. The happy little smile fades. He pauses before the fireplace, takes out his pipe and feels absently along the mantelpiece.

SYDNEY (*softly*): What are you looking for?

HILARY: They've moved my— (*He turns sharply and sees her.*) Meg! It's Meg! Oh, my own darling!

SYDNEY: I—I'm not Meg.

HILARY (*boisterously*): Not Meg! Tell me I don't know Meg! (*Then his voice changes completely.*) No; it's not Meg. Who are you?

SYDNEY (*slowly*): I think I'm your daughter.

HILARY: Daughter! Daughter! By God, that's good! My wife isn't my wife; she's my daughter! And my daughter's seventeen and I'm twenty-two!

SYDNEY: You're forgetting that years and years——

HILARY: Yes, of course. It's years and years. It's a lifetime. It's my daughter's lifetime. What's your name—daughter? (*She tells him.*) Sydney. I like Sydney. (*Catching at his dignity.*) I—I suppose we're rather a shock to each other—Sydney.

SYDNEY: No. You're not a shock to me. But I'm afraid——

Sydney is afraid of the effect of *Hilary's* return on her mother and on her mother's marriage to Gray Meredith. But presently *Margaret* comes in from church.

HILARY (*like a man who can't see*): Meg! Is it Meg? Meg, I've come home!

MARGARET (*terrified, not quite believing the evidence of her eyes*): Sydney, don't go away!

SYDNEY: It's all right, mother. He's come to himself.

HILARY: You don't say a word. Aren't you glad to see me?

MARGARET: Of course—glad—you poor Hilary!

HILARY: If you knew what it is to say to myself, "I'm at home!" That place—Why did you never come?

MARGARET: They wouldn't let me. It made you worse.

HILARY: Because I wanted you so.

MARGARET: But you didn't know me.

HILARY: My voice didn't—and my speech and my actions didn't. But *I* knew you, Meg—behind the curtain—behind the dreams and the noises and the abandonment of God—I wanted you. I wanted—(*He puts his hand to his head*).

SYDNEY: Father—father—go slow! (*To the terrified Margaret*): It's all right, mother. We'll manage.

HILARY: Yes; you tell your mother. I'm all right. *You* understand that, don't you? I tell you, Meg, I'm well! But it's not safe to think back—yet. Not safe to think about anything but— Oh, my dear, the holly and the crackle of the fire and the snow like a veil of peace on me—and you like the snow—so still——

He comes to her without stretched arms and catches her to him. She quivers in repulsion at his touch. *Sydney* looks on, distressed and helpless. They all welcome the announcement of lunch.

GRAY MEREDITH comes in while the *Fairfields* are still at lunch. *Margaret* comes hastily into the hall to tell him of *Hilary's* recovery and home-coming. He is rather impatient with her when she says that she has not yet broken the news of her divorce and her contemplated marriage to *Hilary*. He wants to do it himself, but *Margaret* will not let him. He tells her then that she may have just one hour in which to tell *Hilary* what she chooses, but after that she must come away with him at once. *Hilary* comes in just as *Gray* is leaving, and he immediately senses that there is love between *Margaret* and *Gray*.

HILARY: He's in love with you! Do you think I'm so dazed and crazed I can't see that? You shouldn't let him, Meg! You're such a child you don't know what you're doing when you look and smile——

MARGARET: I do know.

HILARY: Eh? What are you driving at? What are you trying to tell me? It's that man! Is it true? *You?*

MARGARET: I've done nothing wrong. I'm trying to tell you. I only want to tell you and make you understand. Hilary, I divorced you twelve months ago.

Hilary breaks down completely at this. He cries out for *Sydney* and for *Aunt Hester*, but they cannot quiet him. *Sydney*, wisely, had called up *Dr. Alliot* when *Hilary* first came, and they all turn eagerly to him when he enters.

HILARY: Look here, Doctor; she says she's not my wife.

ALLIOT: It's a hard case, Fairfield. Can you throw your mind back to the beginning of the agitation against the marriage laws? No; you were a schoolboy. Well, as a result of that agitation, a commission was appointed to inquire into the working of the divorce laws. It made its report, recommended certain drastic reforms, and there, I suppose, as is the way with commissions, would have been the end of it if it hadn't been for the war—and the war-marriages. Never, I suppose, in one decade were there so many young marriages. Happy? That's another thing. But they were young, those boys and girls who married. As young as Kit, and as impatient as Sydney. And that saved them. That young generation found out, out of their own unhappiness the war taught them, what peace couldn't teach us—that when conditions are evil it is not your duty to submit. And so, when this young generation—yours, not mine, Hilary—decided that the marriage laws were, I won't say evil, but outgrown, they set to work to change them. No man or woman to-day is bound to a drunkard, an habitual criminal or—or to a partner who, as far as we doctors know, is incurably insane—in practise, is insane for more than five years.

HILARY: And if he recovers? Look at me! And you call that justice! Could I help being ill? What have I done?

ALLIOT: Face it, man! One of you must suffer. Which is it to be? The useful or the useless? The whole or the maimed? The healthy woman with her life before her or the man whose children ought never to have been born?

SYDNEY: Is that true, Doctor Alliot?

MARGARET (*her voice shaking*): I think you go too far.

ALLIOT: Mrs. Fairfield, in this matter I cannot go too far.

Miss Fairfield feels that so strong a statement is questioning the wisdom of God and is "enough to call down a judgment." She acquires an ally in the person of *Dr. Pumphrey*, who has called to protest against *Margaret's* marriage.

HILARY: I can't see him. I won't see him. Let me go. I've met the Levites. Spare me the priest. (*He goes stumbling out of the door followed by Dr. Alliot.*)

The rector is an insignificant man with an important manner. With many meanderings and much verbosity he at length manages to convey to *Margaret* that he will not permit *Kit* to marry the daughter of a woman who remarries while her husband is alive. Insanity in the family is of small moment compared to this in his eyes. *Aunt Hester* supports him enthusiastically.

Dr. Alliot comes in to carry the rector off to his afternoon service. He urges *Margaret* to be gentle with *Hilary*, who has entered with him.

HILARY: Oh, Meg, Meg, Meg, isn't there just a chance for me?

MARGARET (*faintly*): Hilary, I can't stand it!

HILARY: Yes; but listen to me! Listen to me! I've been gone so long—I'll not trouble you. I'll not get in your way—but—don't leave me all alone. Give me something—the rustle of your dress, the cushion where you've lain, your voice about the house. You can't deny me such little things, that you give your servants and your dogs.

MARGARET: It's madness!

HILARY: It's naked need!

MARGARET: What good should I be to you? I don't love you, Hilary—poor Hilary! I love him. I never think of anything but him.

HILARY: But it's me you married. You promised—you promised—better or worse—in sickness, in health. You can't go back on your promise. You can't have changed since yesterday——

MARGARET (*in despairing protest*): It's half my life ago.

HILARY: It's yesterday; it's yesterday!

MARGARET: No—no! Hilary, I can't!

HILARY: No; you can't. You can't leave me. You can't do it to me. You can't drive me out—the wilderness—alone—alone—alone. You can't do it, Meg! You can't do it—you can't!

MARGARET (*beaten*): I suppose—I can't.

HILARY: You—you'll stay with me? (*Breaking down utterly*): Oh, God bless you, Meg! God bless you! God bless you!

MARGARET: You mean—God help me!

FROM the moment when she learned from *Aunt Hester* that there is insanity in her father's family, *Sydney* has known that she would have to give up *Kit*. She sounds him when he comes in at tea-time.

SYDNEY: Suppose—you, for instance—suppose you were a queer family—a little, you know. And say your mother was queer—and you weren't. You were perfectly fit, you understand, perfectly fit—what about the children?

KIT: I wouldn't risk it. Thank the Lord your father's is only shell-shock!

Sydney puts an end to the situation by picking a quarrel with him and breaking their engagement.

When *Margaret* tells *Gray Meredith* that she cannot marry him, he refuses to believe her. He rails at *Aunt Hester* and at *Dr. Pumphrey* for their interference. "Damned insolence," he calls it.

MARGARET: But it's not them—it's Hilary. I did fight them. I can't fight Hilary. I see it. It's my own fault. I ought never to have let myself care for you. I've got to stay with him. I've got to put him first, because—because he's weak. You—you're strong.

GRAY: Not strong enough to do without my birthright. I want my wife and my children. I've waited a long while for you. Now you must come.

Sydney comes down the stairs, her mother's coat over her arm. She pauses a few steps from the bottom, afraid to break in on them.

MARGARET: If Hilary's left alone, he'll go mad again.

GRAY: Margaret—come!

MARGARET: You oughtn't to torture me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY: Are you coming with me? I sha'n't ask it again.

MARGARET: O God! You hear him! What am I to do?

GRAY: Why, you're to do as you choose. I sha'n't force you. We're free people, you and I. It's for you to say if you'll keep your —conscience, do you call it?—and lose——

MARGARET: I've lost what I love. There's no more to lose.

GRAY: What you love! You don't

Dr. Alliott (Arnold Lucy) explains to *Hilary* (Allan Pollock) that under the new law a divorce may be obtained if one partner of a marriage is insane for five years.

"Face it, man!"

Sydney

The young lovers discuss the future, all unconscious of the impending tragedy.

Kit Pumphrey (John Astley) would rather remain with *Sydney* (Katharine **Cornell) at home than attend the Christmas service.**

know the meaning of the words you use.

MARGARET: Don't deceive yourself. I love you! I love you! I love you! Can't you see how it is with me? But——

GRAY: There is no "but" in love.

MARGARET: What is it in me? There is a thing I can't do. I can't see such pain.

GRAY: Do you think *I* can't suffer?

MARGARET: But he—he's so defenseless. I can't do it! Forgive——

GRAY: How can I?

MARGARET: I would you——

GRAY: Do you think I bear you malice? It's not I. Why, to deny me—that's a little thing. I'll not go under because you're faithless. But what you're doing is the sin without forgiveness. You're denying—not me—but life. You're denying the spirit of life. You're denying your mate.

SYDNEY (*from the stairs*): Mother, you shall not.

MARGARET (*with a listless gesture*): There's no way out.

SYDNEY: There is. For *you* there is. I've thought it all along, and now I know. Father—he's my job, not yours.

MARGARET: Do you think I'll make a scapegoat of my own child?

SYDNEY: Can you help it? I'm *his* child. Mother! Mother darling, don't you see? You're no good to him. You're scared of him. But I'm his own flesh and blood. I know how he feels. I'll make him happier than you can. Be glad for me. Be glad I'm wanted somewhere.

MARGARET (*struggling against the hope that is flooding her*): But Kit, Sydney—Kit?

SYDNEY (*with a queer little laugh*): Bless him, I'll be dancing at his wedding in six months.

MARGARET: But——

SYDNEY: Oh, I'm off getting married. I'm going to have a career.

MARGARET: The love—the children——

SYDNEY (*strained*): No children for me, mother. No children for me. I've lost my chance forever. But you—you take it. I give it to you.

MARGARET: But——

SYDNEY: What's the use of arguing? I've made up my mind. Go away, mother. This is my job, not yours. (*She turns abruptly from them and stares out into the darkening garden.*)

MARGARET (*a bit dazed, but with a new note in her voice*): Gray, I can come.

They go. Presently the maid brings the tea-things, and *Aunt Hester* and *Hilary* come from the drawing-room.

HILARY (*suspiciously*): I thought I heard the sound of a car. Where's your mother?

SYDNEY: She's gone away. For good. Out of our lives.

AUNT HESTER (*furiously*): This is your doing, Sydney!

HILARY: Gone! Everything gone!

SYDNEY: I'm not gone.

HILARY: But that boy——

SYDNEY: That's done with.

HILARY: I don't see ahead. I don't see what's to become of me. There's no one.

SYDNEY: There's me.

HILARY: I should think you'd hate me.

SYDNEY: I need you just as badly as you need me.

HILARY (*fiercely*): It's your damn clever doing that she went. Do you think I can't hate you?

SYDNEY (*close to him*): No, no, father; you want me too much. We'll make a good job of it yet.

HILARY: What job?

SYDNEY (*her strong will already controlling him*): Living. I've got such plans already, father, father dear! We'll do things. We'll have a good time somehow, you and I—you and I. Did you know you'd got a clever daughter? Writing — painting — acting! We'll go on tour together. We'll make a lot of money. We'll have a cottage somewhere. You see, I'll make it up to you. I'll make you proud of me.

AUNT HESTER: Proud of her! Do you see, Hilary? That's all she thinks of—self—self—self! Money—ambition—and sends that poor boy away. A parson's son! Not good enough for her; that's what it is. She's like the rest of the young women—hard as nails—hard as nails!

SYDNEY (*crying out*): Don't listen to her, father! Father, don't believe her! I'm not hard! I'm not hard! (*His arm goes round her with a gesture, awkward, timid, yet fatherly.*)

"The Hero," by Gilbert Emery, one of the best American plays produced in recent years, will be presented in March EVERYBODY'S—out February 15th.

The Black Horse

Lamplight's Son Didn't Take Kindly to the Curb, and Matey—Well, He Started Out with the Dirtiest Temper in Lankershaw. How these Two, the Four-Footed and the Two-Footed, Worked Out their Salvation Makes a Strong Story—an Unusual One

By Will Levington Comfort

AS A younger boy, Matey Herron used to exercise a talent for showing his temper. He would let go, talking faster and louder until he felt huge and red and altogether unwhipable—but he was always sick afterward. This happened so many times that one day he vowed he would keep quiet the next time he was mad. He did so, but no one noticed. He thought every one would compliment him on holding his rage. He did it again without being congratulated. He stuck to it, however, and a long while later, when he had forgotten, people began to remark that Matey Herron was different from what he used to be.

"His father had the dirtiest temper we had here in Lankershaw," Dode Hamblen remarked, "and Matey started out that way, but he's gettin' hold of hisself lately. His ridin' sure won't be none the worse for that."

Dode Hamblen was the best known and luckiest horse owner in Lankershaw, which was way up in the mountain meadows of Oregon and the "horsiest" little town anywhere. Dode chuckled, and added:

"I remarked to Mrs. Herron that Matey was improvin'—gettin' control over his temper a lot; but she didn't care for the compliment. It was sure cold around when she informed me that Matey never had anything else but a good temper. They don't make 'em tidier 'n gamier than Mrs. Herron. We knew his father, I guess; didn't we? Putting it easy and conservative, I'd call the late Mat Herron an old-fashioned horseman; wouldn't you? Hard hand, hard word, hard eye, hard whip, but no one ever heard a squawk out of Mrs. Herron. She took her medicine, and now she's comin' into her own, because Matey's a manly boy. No; he isn't going to drink to hurt him. A boy often drinks because his father did, but often he doesn't for the same reason."

At seventeen, Matey was said to be ready to begin where his father left off, and that was a long way up as a jockey. A mount was a personal acquaintance to him. He supposed at first that all jockeys got next to their horses, but gradually realized that it was mostly guesswork with them. They weren't really on the inside as to what a horse could do and what a horse would do, which is apt to be different. As for the actual riding end, Matey was, for the most part, the most unobtrusive thing in colors, but there was always a moment in a race when, to a keen, experienced eye, he "raised the bedclothes and looked out."

Matey had come up unscratched out of several smashing falls. A whole field went over him at Burlington, when Clandestine tumbled, but he was up, whipping the dirt out of his silks, before the dust cleared. The old gray gelding, Wampum, fell in the jumps at San Isidro, landed on his frontal bone and stayed there long enough for Matey to glance up and see which way he was going to splash. The boy crawled off on the other side and didn't seem even to move fast. He always had plenty of time in a pinch.

One spring afternoon, Dode Hamblen said,

"Matey, you know that square-toed colt, son of Lamplight?"

"Yes."

"That ain't goin' to grow into a horse, Matey."

Dode always had to talk just so much before he could reach the thing in hand.

"Alec Sanborn came this morning to take away a couple of veal calves," he added. "I tried to have him take the Lamplight colt along to the butcher, but Alec said he wouldn't guarantee to catch him until he had his summer vacation."

Matey listened.

"What's Lampie been doing?" he asked.

"Just spoilin' pasture. Feels so good he keeps up a gallop on his own account from five to seven hours a day. The River Forty looks as if you had driven a harrow over it. I had to take the rest of the young stock out of there, because Lampie milled and herded and stampeded 'em—so they wasn't gettin' no nourishment, only exercise."

"You said he wasn't going to grow up into a horse," Matey suggested.

"Unless it's a river horse. When he ain't trampin' over the young grass, he's runnin' up and down the edge of the river, splashin' hisself cool. Led his mother down the lane to put her in the oak lot, and Lampie dove at the gas-iron fence, bent it like a tornado, trying to get at her—yeh; wanted his old nurse back. Comin' three-year-old and hasn't forgotten his meal-ticket. I'm thinkin' you'd better make up to him, Matey. He ain't likely-looking for speed, but you might give him one chance on the track——"

Here was the point at last, but still Dode banked it in words, adding: "If I hadn't seen him born and bred, I'd say he was goin' to make a draft-horse, not a runner. His father sure ain't going to make no posthumous fame on this colt——"

"It won't be any good for me to try him out, because I'm going away," Matey said.

"Goin' where?" Dode asked crisply.

"Going away to study."

Dode Hamblen wasn't in the least conversational after that. He turned on his heel and walked off, with the remark:

"You're makin' a mistake, Matey."

It was just what the boy expected him to say, but he listened to the words with peculiar impressiveness. For a long time he had been getting sorer and sorer at the idea of being a jockey all his life. The idea in Matey's mind was a two years' course in an Eastern preparatory school and possibly college afterward.

THAT afternoon he walked out toward Dode's bottom-land meadow called the River Forty, hopped over the fence and rambled along the stream through the pasture. Sir Lamplight's first and last colt came trotting toward him, shaggy but eager. Matey chuckled. His front legs looked the same size all the way down—as a schoolboy would draw legs—rather than the way great breeding should make them. He was Roman-nosed already, and seemed all in front, hind quarters actually scrawny. The front hoofs were square and high and straight up—everything that a thoroughbred's shouldn't be. None of this was pronounced, you understand, except to an eye like Matey's.

Dode had once said that the look in this colt's black eye was a leer, but the boy didn't see it so to-day. There wasn't anything stupid or dirty in it. There was wildness, but no red light; wildness, but not madness, it was. He studied the eye, and his mind worked this way: "He isn't mean. He's never been hurt yet, but he seems to know something about being hurt, because he doesn't trust me—nor any one else—Hello!"

The son of Lamplight had come within ten feet and stood stock-still until his nerve snapped. Unable to stand another second, he shot a blast of air out of his clean nostrils and went straight up, drawing in his front legs to his chest and arching his neck. There was challenge in the fling of his head and a hurl of joyous strength in his leap, straight up from his hind feet, coming down with a whirl to the side. There was a bit of baby left in the performance, but marvelous promise of suppleness and power. Suppleness—that was the word that meant most to Matey's mind. Now the two-year-old was making a half-circle round him, and in a sliding, curving trot—a stealthy, settled look behind.

The word "cat-muscled" came to the boy's lips. It is difficult to explain. The slightest word makes the impression altogether too pronounced, but there was a quality of spring and restraint to the rear flanks that Matey had never seen before. The boy talked to him, and the colt halted again. The darkness was coming in rapidly; the long River Forty looked lonesome and shadowy. Loneliness crept into Matey's soul that minute. He wondered if the thing that he had called wildness in the colt wasn't just that—loneliness.

Pity for the whole business struck him in an altogether unusual way. Dode Hamblen wasn't going to leave a bit of watered meadow like this to an unproductive colt—not long. One morning, Dode would decide that he wanted the pasture, and he'd call Haidie Curran over with a lariat, and they would geld the young chap while they had him down, and then they would stall him until he'd lost his courage. If there was any stuff left in him when they let him out, it would turn sour.

The colt came closer, within six or seven feet, then braced his front hoofs when he heard the boy's calling tones. He promised big of bone in every detail. His name, Lampblack, had been suggested by the soft, dense black of his muzzle. Matey had never ridden Sir Lamplight, this colt's sire, who had belonged to Nels Anscomb, also of Lankershaw. That stallion had had a big racing-season as a three-year-old. Anscomb's problem at the end of that year was whether to send Lamplight out for still higher honors or retire him to the stud. Always a ruffian, the big chap broke away one June night, before his future was decided upon, and they found him the next day ten miles away, running with Betty Java, Dode Hamblen's best brood-mare. Out of that night-running came this wild young chap before Matey's eyes. Sir Lamplight tried to break out again a night or two after that, but broke his leg and Nels Anscomb's heart instead.

Matey crossed the pasture toward the fence, leaped over into the lane and started for the stables. He wasn't nearly so happy as he thought he would be, ready to go away to study. Dode Hamblen's words, "You're makin' a mistake," came back to him and made him ugly for a minute. He halted now, hearing at last the soft padding behind him. The colt had been keeping pace with him on the other side of the fence. Matey put his hand over the rail. Lampblack came closer than before. His warm breath touched the boy's fingers. Matey laughed and waited, talking softly, then moved on to the end of the lane, lost in his own thoughts again. Darkness was about him, and he would have forgotten, except for the whistle from Lampblack's nostrils when he reached the end of his own pasture. Matey turned back with a start. It was as if the colt had called him, saying, "You're not going off like that, are you?"

"Why, you and I could get along together," the boy muttered. "You're not crooked. You're only different. You're only lonesome and different——"

JUST then, still standing there with his hand over the rail, Matey heard Mrs. Hamblen's supper-call—always a high-carrying voice. He wouldn't hear that much more, he thought—not for a while—or Dode's monologues. Then his hand was touched—the hand that he had left over the fence—the softest, gentlest nudge of Lampblack's muzzle. The son of Lamplight had given his oath of allegiance once and for all, and it meant, "I will wait for you." But Matey did not know.

"It's a shame I've got to go away," he said in a low voice. "You and I could get along together. It's hard luck for you, because they won't understand. No; they won't understand, kid. Even old Dode thinks you're mean. I know you're not mean—only lonesome and different."

Half-way down the lane he saw a film of white through the dusk and heard the swift feet of a girl his own age—Nels Anscomb's daughter Nettie. She touched his arm as she came up.

"Your mother says you're going away."

"I haven't spoken much about it yet."

"You never speak about anything. But don't get frightened; she didn't tell any one else—only me."

"Don't you think I'd better go?" he asked.

"I don't think at all, Mat. It's all righ—t if *you* are perfectly sure."

"But my mother says it's right for me to go."

"Of course. She'd die rather than stand in your way."

"You're just like every one else," he said.

"You want me to hang around here and be a jockey."

"That's silly, Mat. The horses never got our family anything but misery."

That made him think of the sire of the black colt in the river-lot. Sir Lamplight had been her father's last hope of worldly fortune.

"I've just been out there with Lamplight's colt, Nettie. Queer cuss, but not mean," he said. "I've been out there since before dark—couldn't get away, somehow. He's queer and different—not like any other colt. There's a crawl to him behind, as if he was letting down a little to get in a door too low for him."

Matey could always make himself understood with Nettie listening—actually forgot himself at times, even becoming explicit.

"If he ever let that crawl out, there'd sure be a sprint in him. He isn't built like a race-horse, but there's something in him. I'd give him a try-out this fall, if I wasn't going away——"

They walked in silence for a half minute.

"And he's going to be big—a rangy brute, by the look of him now."

Matey looked back into the dark.

"He didn't want me to go," he chuckled. "You see, Dode's left him all alone out there——"

Her brown eyes were blurred. She had never seen Matey like this. He had never forgotten himself quite like this before. She wanted him to go on and on about the black two-year-old.

"I always thought his mother was pretty," she said, with a cough.

"Betty Java ought to be good. She's bred right and shaped right, but Dode isn't pleased with her last two colts. As for Lampblack, no one understands him. Nettie, did I tell you he nudged my hand when I was looking away? I was looking this way. I'd forgotten that my hand was hanging over the fence."

"Maybe it meant something," she urged softly.

"Mis' Hamblen had just called supper, and I was thinking about going away. Before that, he went up in the air just to show what he could do—the flirtiest little guy!"

Something he didn't dream of was taking place within her.

"But he's going to be rat-tailed," Matey added.

Then they were close to the Hamblen paddock.

"Aren't you in a hurry to get home to supper?" he whispered.

"Yes." But her steps did not quicken.

"I never saw you like this, Nettie," he said queerly, looking close into her face. "You're usually in such a rush."

"It's so soft and dark—sort of hovering—as if it didn't know what it was going to do——"

"You mean the weather?"

"Yes."

"It's going to rain—that's what it's going to do."

MATEY was back in Lankershaw after two years. He had to help out at home now. College was indefinitely postponed. Dode Hamblen had this to say of the boy on his return:

"Matey's true to the jockey breed. He must be twenty years old, and hasn't gained a pound since he left—leaner than ever, but he's sure put a nose on while he's been gone. Can't say's I ever saw Matey's nose before. Come to think of it, I don't believe he had one, growin' up, but he sure put in a lot of good licks growin' one while he was away this trip. No; I don't know what the boy's goin' to do. Matey's as close-mouthed as his father. Nobody knows, unless it's Nels Anscomb's little girl. Matey always did tell *her* what was eatin' him. Queer about them two fightin' all the way up—yet they can't do without each other. The boy runs to Nettie when he's in a fix, and Nettie runs to him or to his mother. What Lankershaw actually hears about either one of 'em, it has to get from the parson or the register of deeds."

Matey and Nettie Anscomb were coming in toward town after a walk up to where the river narrowed.

"You look great," he said.

Her eyes narrowed as if the sun were in them, but they still held his face.

"And you, Mat—you're different. Such a cool, steady thing about you—why, I'm not in the least afraid of your blowing up any more."

Matey dwelt upon this, word by word, with a deep, appreciative calm. She was an inch taller; her cheeks were not so round, and there was something that frightened him in her open throat. It was like summer.

There was young stock in all the pastures; the sky was of an unfathomable blue. He breathed deep and with silent delight. There hadn't been breaths like this since he went away. The pastures rolled green as never before to his eyes, and down in the bottoms the river talked softly.

"Where are we going?" he asked presently, as she turned into one of the back lanes skirting Hamblen's land and headed toward the dwindled and neglected meadows still belonging to the Anscomb household.

"In here. It looks so still."

He had turned to the pasture at the sound of hoofs. A rakish, long-bodied stallion was loping toward them with a sort of high, lounging stride. Matey's eyes fixed upon the horse. They became harder and harder. Nettie's eyes settled upon his face.

"Who's that fellow over here in your lot? Nettie—why, Nettie, that's—why, that's the kid I talked to almost the last day at dark! You joined me up the lane afterward——"

His thin lips moved loosely. He was entirely wrapped in his study of the stallion. Nettie's eyes never left his face.

"I wanted you to have another *talk* with him," she laughed.

"You brought me here on purpose?"

"Yes."

"He can't be yours, Nettie—you don't mean you bought him?"

"No; I couldn't quite do that, but Dode was good about it. When I told him that I wanted him, he said I sure had to be considered, because there was a bit of unfinished business about that colt that my father didn't live to understand. But Dode still has a half-interest. Lampie's been in our meadows for more than a year. We opened the lane to the barn-yard, and he came down to the sheds and the old stacks when the weather was cold."

Matey's hand was out toward the stallion. He had been softly calling. He turned with a quick, queer glance to Nettie now.

"Why—did you say you did this?"

"I wanted you to have another talk with him."

"So you kept him for me. And you've got a half-interest, and here he is coming five year old—and never a stirrup over him! Did you get a hunch, Nettie?"

She searched his face in her keen, swift way.

"I heard Dode was trying to sell the colt. I just couldn't stand it—after what you said, and then my father set such a store by Lamplight——"

"He keeps the land torn up just like he used to——"

"Dode Hamblen figured that he did thirty miles a day before he left the other pasture," she said. "Running's all he knows. Sometimes mother and I hear the drum of his hoofs at night. It always makes Manto bark in a certain way."

Manto was the old Anscomb setter.

Matey kept calling softly. His short, rapt sentences to Nettie were in between the calls.

"I remember something my father said. I was a little kid at the table. If he ever had a colt that looked good to him, he said he'd save him until he grew up—keep him off the track and keep man and boy off his back—until his size and weight were set. He said that a good Arab colt is kept with his mother as long as this one was, that he runs free, petted and fooled with, but never saddled until he's mature. Those Arab horses live long and get better and better. They treat 'em like members of the family—the mares held higher than the sires. My father knew. Dode knows it. Any horseman knows that we ruin thousands of thoroughbreds every year, beginning to race 'em when they're only babies. Here's a fellow coming five year old— Say; wouldn't it be great, Nettie, if under that shag and bur and thistle—wouldn't it be great if we could uncork something?"

MATEY went to work for Hamblen in the daytime; still there was time for the weedy son of Lamplight in the neglected Anscomb meadows. Nettie often went with him in the evening or early morning. On Sundays, the boy would take a book out to the meadows and study for hours with his back against a post, calling cheerfully to Lampblack from time to time. Always he brought something—a bit of grain or fresh meal, a lump of salt or sugar. He found a lot of amusement in the big fellow's surprise at these flavors. Five years of meadow is a stretch of simple life. There was amusement, too, in watching the stallion fight with himself not to come closer. Matey could be just as distant and frosty at the proper time.

Everybody's Magazine, February, 1922

One day, Nettie held her breath when the stallion stood trembling and Matey walked round him. No animal could hold out against this kind of patience. Another time, Matey's hand was lost for a second or two under the scraggly little mane and appeared again on Lampblack's withers, then slid along the spine, knuckling into the bones where the saddle would one day lie. Within a month, the big fellow was following him round the lot. One moonlight night, Matey walked home with Nettie on the narrow lane-path, and they fell into single file at times, so that the dew upon the dusty weeds would not soil her dress.

"To-morrow I'll put a halter on him," he said. He felt a little shiver pass through her arm. "Cold?" he asked.

"No."

"What, then?"

"It was just the sound—*putting the halter* on him."

Once she found out that Matey could sing—after a fashion. Doubtless he had thought she was in the far end of the lot at the time. He seemed to be calling Lampblack to come to him—not with words only, but an old song of the South:

> Swing a-low, sweet char-i-o-ot,
>   Comin' for to carry me home.
> Swing a-low, sweet——

Nettie went back to the house instead of joining him, for fear Matey would be embarrassed.

THE black horse didn't like the taste of rubber. Used to getting grain and candy, he took the rubber-bound bit on the same trusting basis that it would turn into something delectable. But when the man's hand dropped away and the rigid thing stayed in his mouth, the thoroughbred was disgusted and made faces. Matey came quickly to his relief. By this time, he had begun to work on the big fellow's coat and to harden him up with small feedings of grain. It was as he had remarked long ago—Lampblack didn't run to hair. The best that could be said of his mane was that it was desultory; neither could "rat-tailed" be improved upon for the other word, but his coat answered to treatment. Five years of neglect—five years of sun and wind and rain, of pollen and bur and mire—Matey uncovered much that would be interesting to science. 'Way down underneath was a most extraordinary black horse.

Nettie was at hand when Matey leaped on the stallion's back for the first time. This was two months after his return to Lankershaw. Lampblack had a bridle on, but no saddle—merely a wide hempen cinch. He shivered queerly and settled behind, as if paralyzed with fear. Matey talked quietly, putting no pressure on the bit, merely keeping the reins straight. The thoroughbred backed and lifted a little from the turf in front. Matey leaned forward, still patting his shoulder and talking gently. Lampblack burst into a trot for a few paces, halted, blew through his nose like an exploding tire, then started to lope a little, rocking high. This eased his nerves. He settled into a run, and still the reassuring voice went on.

"He would have run all day," Matey told the girl afterward. "I could feel him getting straight with himself as he ran—especially when he found I liked it, too. I didn't let him out. He wanted to go into the air a little when I checked him, but I kept talking. He's the strongest thing I ever felt under me. He isn't like a horse—something like a tiger or a snake— I don't mean that. It's nothing wicked, you understand. Oh, you can't tell it——"

"But you can, Mat," she answered. "You always make *me* understand."

He grinned at her, and his mind appeared to revert to the recent ride.

"I didn't let him out," he repeated. "About three months from now, when he's good and hard—about three months—then I'll look for a whip——"

"You don't mean that!"

He laughed.

"You frightened me, Mat," she said.

"Why, Nettie, if I touched that fellow with a whip, he'd never stop running. Either that, or he'd uncouple himself."

Matey's large capacity for keeping still was in fine working-order right now. Lamplight's son was getting a work-out every day, but he had never been exposed, so far, in fast "brushes" with other horses. It hadn't proved too hard to get a saddle on Lampblack, to teach him to answer the bit or to walk or run at the word; but for many hours, during many days, often until Matey himself was pale with exhaustion, he worked with the headstrong thoroughbred to make him steady at the post in the kid trials and to hold his nerve when "running in the pack."

Dode Hamblen couldn't get a line on what the son of Lamplight could do. He would follow the work-outs with his field-glass, but Matey either kept his mount under a pull or there was no class to let out. One day, Dode took a tape measure out to the track, after having watched what looked like some fast galloping on the far side. There were other tracks to confuse Lampblack's imprints, and Dode didn't want to be caught at this sort of thing. What he appeared to find was incredible, anyway. Lampblack's running, when looked at this way, was a series of leaps, fully two feet longer than those of any runner he had ever seen before. There must be a mistake.

One thing really troubled the Lankershaw owner. The time came when Matey could do anything with the stallion, but no one else shared his good feelings. Lampblack was never ugly or aggressive, but something of the old wildness came to him when any one else even undertook his care. He was a one-man horse—that was the size of it—and Dode Hamblen didn't care for this brand. He was canny enough to know that if the thoroughbred did amount to anything, the owner was absolutely dependent upon one particular jockey, who could ask what he pleased. Matey was not only jockey in this case, but trainer and groom as well.

The following spring, when Matey was just twenty-two, the black horse was entered for a mile-even event at the Sunset track. Lampblack got himself disliked at the post, standing up a lot in a sort of ungovernable fury to get away. The race itself was peculiarly thrill-less. Matey ran his mount fourth at the quarter and half, third at three-quarters, and nosed out a horse named Pauncefoot at the finish. Dode Hamblen pocketed his cautious winnings, but had little or no knowledge about the black horse other than he started with, because the time posted for the event was slow.

"Any horse that couldn't beat old sallow-necked Pauncefoot, after the work that Matey's put on him, would sure have stopped to change his shoes," the Lankershaw owner said.

Three weeks la[illegible] [illegible]pblack was entered at Hermosa, [illegible] [illegible]r little Western track, to carry one [illegible] and twenty-four pounds in the Good Measure stakes. Though he won here, too, the time was slow. Midsummer, farther East, the black horse took a mile-and-a-quarter event at Burlington, carrying a hundred and twenty-six and just comfortably passing Maidstone at the finish. She was said to be a very good mare.

From the telegrams, Dode found something significant about this race, though the time was not particularly fast. Lampblack had won in spite of an almost prohibitive getaway. It appears that the Western stallion had been all but elbowed off the table at the start by jockey Ebers riding Pasadena. The point of all this was that Lampblack made up eight or nine lengths to take first money.

"Just mark my words," Dode Hamblen said. "Just put it down to me that Mrs. Herron is about due to be painting her house."

But nothing like that happened. Mrs. Herron wasn't putting prosperity on the outside yet. She had been without it so long that the few hundreds that came in as a result of first winnings vanished right into the ground like long-deferred rain. The Herron cottage remained weather-stained for the present, but what really happened was that Nettie Anscomb and Mrs. Herron appeared at the railway station one morning.

"They were sort of leanin' against each other," Dode said. "They looked white, as if they were goin' farther than the ice-plant down in Flume City. The station-agent reports that their transportation read somewhere in New York state, and since Matey's taking Lampblack on to Ivanhoe for the Julian Cup, and since Ivanhoe is the race-track name for a place touching the border of New York state— But I wouldn't care to jump at conclusions none."

Personally, Dode always kept wondering about that extra two feet in Lampblack's stride.

MATEY himself was looking hard toward the Julian Cup at Ivanhoe. Wolfville was entered, a great horse in Matey's eyes—one in a thousand, this Wolfville, and the product of a lineage curiously similar to Sir Lamplight's—but this black gelding had been in the public's grace for three years. He would easily run favorite in the Julian affair; Sublimate second, probably, in the betting. A mile and one-eighth—one of the big running-events of the year. Matey's face hardened a little at the thought of meeting Ebers again—Ebers, who had ridden Pasadena at Burlington, now to ride the clay-colored Foolscap, a hard mare to beat, especially on a heavy track.

"Nine horses entered," he muttered to Lampblack, standing in the half-dark box stall. "And you've got to carry some packages of lead—one hundred and thirty, they say."

The black horse didn't hear. He swung his Roman head away from Matey's arm and lopped it over the half-door. Spindrift, a chestnut filly, was just mincing through the corridor in her bath-robe, and Lampblack couldn't let anything like that get by.

"Nine horses entered," Matey repeated again, still as if he were computing, "and four of 'em haven't been able to keep it a secret that they can run. What are we going to do about it? Say; come here and talk to me. She'll kick your eye out, mister, and get the other eye while you're thinking about it——"

That particular colloquy was never finished. Matey was taking his charge out to the paddock when he passed Spindrift again. She was in charge of a colored man, and the two thoroughbreds met in an alley between two sets of stables. Matey spoke warningly to Lampblack, and the big fellow was all at his best—merely a bit showy. The chestnut filly, however, was self-conscious. She felt that there was no use whatsoever in concealing the fact that she was irresistible—though it was a nuisance, of course. She lifted and struck at Lampblack in passing. Matey, who was between her and the black, was watching for that, but he didn't turn in time to catch Spindrift in the act of "letting fly" from behind.

Matey stood a minute, his eyes blazing his face gone white.

"Take her on—take her away!" he called to the colored man, who had halted and was peering about to see if any harm was done. "Shut her up quick!" Matey called. "Then come back here and get this fellow."

Not until the filly was out of sight did Matey let himself down to the turf, still holding Lampblack's bridle-rein. It was in the ambulance that they told him, but he knew before that—right leg broken six inches below the hip. He couldn't ride for the Julian Cup. And Lampblack was a one-man horse! And Nettie and his mother were due to arrive to-morrow!

Matey didn't feel much pain in his leg. Even when they were setting it, he was more shattered from the pain of his thoughts. The race was nearly three weeks away. He might be out of the hospital then, the doctors said, but it would be six weeks before he could use his leg again. All season he had worked for this—for Lampblack to show a little something for the Julian Cup. He would have to, running against the best stake-horses "in the community." Now Dode would have the "I told you so" on him—about Lampblack being a one-man horse.

Matey writhed. His eyes roved from fly to fly on the dingy terra-cotta ceiling of the receiving hospital. Why—why was it? He had worked clean—to bring out the best of a neglected thing. "The stone the builders had rejected," as the parson of Lankershaw had said. And they were coming—Nettie and his mother—to see Lampblack in a real race—to see him ride!

Thus the two women found him—something black and hurt deep in his eyes. It was as if something fundamental were hurt because he couldn't understand. Nettie and the mother saw it. The spirit of each rose in a different way. The loss of money was nothing; the broken leg was nothing compared to this hurt, this shadow upon the spirit of his courage, this forming, forming of the deadly word "Why?"

MATEY sat up in bed. It was three days after he had been hurt—three hard days. He wanted to throw up Lampblack's chance for the Julian Cup. The thought of letting any other jockey put a leg over the thoroughbred roused all the fight in him—the silent, wasting, deadly fighting inside. Lampblack would do anything for him—would come to his call, would answer his voice with a nicker, any time, day or night. His future was ordained in Matey's mind like laws which do not change. Yet Dode Hamblen had wired a suggestion for "Smoke" Mellen to ride Lampblack for the Julian Cup.

Nettie saw how this telegram hurt. She saw the pallor of Matey's temples and the great strain of struggle that had gone on inside. He was always fighting inside, and right now he wanted her to agree with him about scratching Lampblack from the race.

"It will mean the loss of a lot of money—" he began, in an effort to be square. She didn't speak. "And Dode will have the laugh on me—if Lampie don't run. He always said it was bad luck to bring up a one-man horse." Still she didn't speak. "Besides, you and mother coming here, the expense——"

"It isn't expense. It isn't money, nor what Dode Hamblen thinks," she said at last. "It's you, Mat! You'd better let another man ride Lampblack, because it's the one hard thing for you to do—the one hard thing that will set you free!"

He didn't answer. His eyes were staring at the ceiling. She left him after a few minutes. She was alone for a while, and her own eyes smarted, because she never could talk any other way to Matey Herron. It seemed that from a little girl she had been telling him the harder thing to do—that the hard way was the safe way, and best.

That afternoon, Matey's mother came out from his room, saying that Matey had decided to ask "Smoke" Mellen to ride Lampblack.

"He says he wants to show Dode Hamblen that Lampie isn't a one-man horse," Mrs. Herron added.

Nettie turned her face away, and her lips moved with the sentence: "But he is a one-man horse."

LAMPBLACK was posted seven to one in the betting for the Julian Cup.

"They are beginning to get a line on him," Matey said. "That fellow Ebers cost us a lot of money in making Lampie sprint that time back at Burlington. The wise ones don't miss anything like that. We ought to have had three times seven with Wolfville and Sublimate and Foolscap in a race."

Wolfville was favorite at five to six. There had been rain the night before and a shower at ten in the morning. This brought up Foolscap from three to one to two to one, with quite a little backing. A glorious October afternoon with not a cloud in the sky, and a big crowd out. The Julian was always an affair to the public's taste. Matey, in the paddock, was in a wheel-chair with a crutch across his knee, his leg still in the cast. "Smoke" Mellen was a colored jockey with a lot of experience. He had ridden Lampblack in try-outs for several days, with uncertain results to all concerned, including himself. Matey had watched these try-outs with his own keen eyes and a glass for distance. Lampblack had been in the air a good deal, rocking a little and not forgetting himself, as a horse must. He had banged his head about and seemed unable to get down to business. Certainly he hadn't shown "Smoke" what he could do, and the jockey hadn't been too curious, it appeared. Matey saw that "Smoke" was white—just before the Julian affair was called. His own heart sank.

"Lampie's riding him, Nettie," he whispered. "They don't like each other."

Her face was white, too, but Matey didn't notice that.

"Could you wheel me over toward him?" he asked, after a moment.

She trundled him nearer the horses.

"Oh, 'Smoke!' " Matey called quietly.

The jockey looked down.

"Better leave that whip with me."

It was spoken like a bit of stable humor, but there was deadly seriousness back of the words. "Smoke" Mellen only smiled in a sickly fashion.

They had boosted Matey, chair and all, up on the platform which held the scales. It was near the big gate that opened to the track. To the right were the stands. The Julian was a mile-and-one-eighth event; so the start was to the left, at the turn of the stretch. The horses would go by the gate when they were well away, and also in the white heat of the finish. Matey couldn't see the start for the turn of the fence. It came after a dragging, killing tension, but he caught from the stands that it wasn't particularly pleasing for the favorite.

In the lull that followed the start, Matey slowly realized, as of old, that in the next couple of minutes he would know all about everything. His eyes were fixed upon the dark nodding heads behind the curving white fences. He felt sick and unnatural. He was seeing again the old wild look that had been in Lampblack's eye. The black horse hadn't understood. Nothing was right to him—nothing right without the man he was tied to. But the man himself suffered more. Nettie stood beside him on the platform. His mother had hurried up into the stands. He heard the name: "Wolfville!" "Wolfville!" "Wolfville!" "There didn't seem to be anything else running.

Now a bay head appeared. It was Sublimate, and, at his heels, Foolscap—then Thierry and Collingsby together—then the steerage, with Wolfville pocketed in the center and Lampblack trailing—that high, rocking head! Lampblack was very far from getting down to business as he went by the stands—in no way stretched out to his work——

They had done five-eighths and were straight across the track. Foolscap now led, Ebers riding as if he would kill the mare to win. Sublimate was hanging on, a close second, and Wolfville, out of the ruck, was running third, but six lengths behind. Then came the pack, with Lampblack trailing. The horses out ahead were working for laurels—Sublimate looked very good. It came coldly over Matey Herron just now that Mellen might have some idea of his own—other business at hand—just a "chill" of suspicion, so to speak. There was a lot of movement to Lampblack, but he didn't seem to get forward with it. Every second of sulk now was calamity.

"He looks like a rocking-horse, Nettie," the boy whispered. "He's not—he's not being ridden. He should have left that rear bunch before the half."

Matey didn't look for an answer. His own thoughts had merely found his lips, because she was close. Sublimate forged ahead at the three-quarter mark, with Wolfville three lengths behind, and Foolscap, already beaten, slipping back. The pace had been grueling for the distance.

Lampblack was the fourth horse to pass the three-quarter; but he was at least ten lengths behind Wolfville. Now the fences sort of ricochetted before Matey's eyes. The stands were up and roaring, every man, woman and child apparently wanting Wolfville. Something happened in there when the fences cut off the runners. Things were not the same when the two front horses turned into the stretch. Wolfville and Sublimate were running neck to neck. Fully eight lengths behind, two more appeared—but only for an instant—two! Lampblack literally mowed down the clay-colored mare. As he began to come on in the stretch, the stands were still. With long, frictionless leaps, the Roman-nosed one was literally eating up daylight between himself and Sublimate, now second.

A lot of great thoroughbreds had come down that old stretch at Ivanhoe, but never one like this. Yet that was nothing to Matey Herron. That wouldn't have wrung the cry from his throat—a cry that had a rattle in it, as if something inside were loose or broken. The speed was no surprise to him. He alone knew what the black horse could do. It was the figure of "Smoke" Mellen folded forward and whipping like a fiend.

Wolfville had looked to have it all his own way. The Ragan boy, who rode him, turned with an easy smile, but he saw a mighty galloping machine less than four lengths behind and two hundred yards from home. Ragan bent back to his work, but the rest was supernatural. The great black stretched out. He seemed twice as large as Wolfville ahead. He ran more like a hound than a horse. There seemed something inevitable in the hush. Matey could see strange defects, never seen before, in horses like Wolfville and Sublimate and the clay-colored mare. They were stilted and slowed-up. Wolfville seemed deep in the mud as he was passed. Lampie had a length to spare at the finish—and the secret was out, bald to the world.

NETTIE was staring into Matey's face. It was little and deadly white. She saw the whitish hair at his temples, the silent, maniacal rage back in his eyes. It wasn't red. It was more terrible than red—*white*. She caught him in her arms.

"Oh, don't, Mat! You'll break your leg again!"

It seemed slow, the way he turned to her in that roaring crowd. His hand pointed to the track. She couldn't see Lampblack.

"He'll kill himself for that whipping! He'll never stop until his heart breaks. He'll uncouple himself! Let me go. Nettie, I'll be hurt more—if you don't. Let me go——"

He was down in the throng, beating his way through with his crutch. The thing in the cast dangled some of the time, but did its part when the crutch was lifted. She tried to run beside him, lifting half his weight; but she was horribly out of step. They were at the gate—now open for the runners to come in.

Matey was on the track. He didn't turn into the crowd in front of the stands but back up the deserted stretch. The crowd down on the turf began to get uneasy as to what it was missing, because in the stands people were on their feet, roaring as if there was another race on. The comparatively unknown black stallion that had just won didn't know the race was over. He had passed the quarter again—stretched out as when he crossed the tape. His jockey was up and sawing, apparently without the slightest effect. It was so at the half—the winner running away! And not one saw the two forlorn figures up the stretch—an absurd kind of a tangle of legs and cast and crutch.

Often his eyes turned over the fences across the track. Now they could see the rider there, sitting straight up, the black crest moving along the fence in front of him, evenly as the stack of an engine. To Nettie, it seemed they were out in a great loneliness, as if they were left alone on a barren island and the voices behind were the voices of the receding ship. Lampblack was round the turn of the stretch. They heard the drum of hoofs. Absently, in her agony, she listened for Manto to bark. The boy beside her looked broken and dying—a thing temporarily galvanized by an invisible purpose. Now he began to call. His voice was hoarse, horribly weak at first. "Hai, Lampie! Hai, mister!" He got it to working better. "Hai, Lampie. Come on, kid! Come in! Come in!"

They were only half-way up the stretch when the black horse turned, coming down.

"Hai, old son! Come in, baby—right here, big man! He's right here, black man—waiting for to carry you home!"

Matey had dropped his crutch. The runner was thundering down the stretch as fast as he had come in the mile before. "Smoke" Mellen, his face insanely gray and open, his shoulders braced back, made a queer, whining cry as he came on. The runner's mouth was full of blood, the lather on his chest blackened with flecks from the bit.

The boy looked so small there on one leg, his arms out, his voice raising higher and higher.

"Swing a-low, sweet char-i-o-ot
  Comin' for to carry me home.
Swing a-low, sweet——"

The black swerved and flashed past, but the voice followed him on. It had seemed to Nettie that the great Roman head was lifted a little, but the speed did not diminish. Matey was crumpled on the turf.

"If he ever gets through the crowd at the stand—he's a goner," he said, looking up at her coldly. "He'll run the mile again."

Lampblack was in the crowd in front of the stand. The girl saw that the hundreds of men there had made a ragged opening, but for a few seconds she could not see the horse. A solitary figure was running toward them—a woman—Matey's mother! Now, behind his mother, in the midst of the men, she saw the great head of the stallion lift again above the throng. He had veered and lifted to dodge some hand probably reaching for a bridle-rein.

"Mat—oh, Mat, he's coming back!"

The boy could not rise now, but his voice lifted again.

"Run over to the outer fence, Nettie!"

The black was coming toward them—an empty saddle, his head high.

Matey sat sideways upon the turf—one hand raised, his lips moving. The stallion went by him again, ears cocked.

Matey sang louder.

Nettie left the fence, ran back toward the stands to stop the woman and others now following the thoroughbred. She heard the voice from behind, even when the other voices were about her. When she turned, Matey was just the same, the one hand upraised, but the son of Lamplight was close to him, and going closer—an eager trot.

She stood holding them back—men and boys—until she heard a catch in the throat of the mother, and knew Matey's lifted hand was filled with the bridle-rein. Now she had turned and was running toward him.

He was still on the ground, the horse standing above him. Matey's one hand held the hanging leather loosely; the other lifted now to touch the welts on Lampblack's shoulder.

MATEY'S leg had caved in under him a second time out there on the stretch after the race, but his face grew serene as the days passed, because Lampblack didn't appear to be ruined. Dode Hamblen arrived from the West, and had a theory.

"I don't believe the stallion rightly knows what happened to him. You see, Matey,

Everybody's Magazine, February, 1922

he had run a mile or so before 'Smoke' put the whalebone to him, and his blood was hot. Why, he could run the Julian Cup every afternoon——"

Dode halted, because he saw a look of pain cross Matey Herron's face.

"It wasn't only a running, Dode. It was a sprint. Along about the seven-eighths in the first mile, he began to sprint—the kind you keep for the last furlong, and he kept it up the rest of the first and full second mile."

"Can't help it, my son. He ain't hurt none. Runnin' that way is what he does best. His heart sounds steady as an ocean liner. I'm gamblin' he's a one-man horse from now on, but, Matey, if you hadn't broken your leg, you'd never have seen him run."

Dode wanted to send Lampblack to England.

"A horse like ours is a superhorse, Matey," he added, "and it ain't fair to keep him away from the public. There's the Henrietta Plate at two and three-quarter miles, the Goodbright Stakes at three miles, and the Cap and Bells. They'll make him carry a hundred and thirty for that. Did I hear you say anything?" The young man didn't answer. "If he's the greatest running machine that ever lived, don't we want to know it?"

"I know it now,"Matey said.

"But the world don't know it."

"I'll see what Nettie says."

Matey stood on two legs a month after that, almost as good as new. It was finally proved that the black horse had not been organically hurt, nor had he lost his hard-won faith in one man.

"I'm so glad for you," Nettie said. "Does it mean England, Matey—and college?"

He stepped back from her. The color left her face queerly as he watched.

"You never called me 'Matey' before."

"Everybody else calls you that."

"It's England only if you go along," he said.

It was dusk. They moved out on the fire-escape from his little room in the hotel near the track. Matey spoke.

"I wish we were back in the lane—your lane back of the locust trees——"

"I love Dode Hamblen's lane best—where I really saw you first—the day you and Lampie talked until dark—just before you went away."

He shivered. A little later he said,

"I'll have 'em all call me 'Mat' after this."

Follow

By Mary Stewart Cutting

CLIMBING the rock-hewn steps with thee,
Take hold of my hand, thou Dearest One!
Far at the top, in the setting sun,
Is the palace, the palace to which we flee,
The palace to shelter thee and me.
Oh, take my hand, thou Dearest One!

Thy feet are tired; the stones are many;
Fain would I carry thee, Sweet and Dear!
But each must climb the stairway here.
Only my hand may help thee any,
And thou art tired, oh, Sweet and Dear!

The way is long and the steps are high;
Faint not, falter not, though I go
A little ahead as the light gets low—
A little ahead where the shadows lie.
This is my voice that calls to thee;
This is my heart that answers thine.
Our hands are loosened, yet follow me,
Follow, follow, thou Darling Mine!

The Mystery *of* Ravensdene Court

A Feast for Those Who Hunger for Mystery, Adventure—and Who Doesn't? The Trail Leads in Many Directions and a Strange Kidnaping Takes Place

By J. S. Fletcher

Illustration by Harry Fisk

MY JOURNEY to Alnwick, a remote village on the Northumbrian coast, in March, 1912, was undertaken at the request of Francis Raven, owner of Ravensdene Court, to whom I had been recommended to catalogue and appraise a collection of old books and manuscripts which he had recently inherited from an uncle. His letter stated that his household consisted only of himself and a nineteen-year-old niece, from which circumstance he could not promise anything very lively in the way of amusement, but held forth a prospect of more congenial society in the presence of Septimus Cazalette, eminent authority on numismatics, who was working on a vast collection of coins and medals also formed by his deceased kinsman.

I left the train at Alnmouth, the nearest station, and decided to take advantage of the fine, bracing morning and walk the rest of the distance, about nine or ten miles. On the way I overtook a thick-set, middle-aged man, undoubtedly a follower of the sea, who introduced himself as Salter Quick, of Devonport. His errand in a part of England so distant from his home was, he told me, to look for graveyards containing tombstones with the name of Netherfield—his mother's people.

At an inn, where I offered my interesting acquaintance some liquid refreshment, the landlord disclaimed any knowledge of the name Netherfield in the locality, but a drover who happened to be in the place imparted the curious information that only two days before a stranger, evidently a seafaring man, had made of him the very same inquiries as to gravestones with "Netherfield" on them. This seemed to disturb Quick greatly.

Leaving him at the inn, I continued on my way, and finally came to the park surrounding Ravensdene Court, in which I met a girl who addressed me by name, Middlebrook, told me my luggage had arrived, and that they had received the message I had sent announcing my intention to walk from Alnmouth. This, of course, was Marcia, the niece to whom Mr. Raven had referred in his letter, and she conducted me to my host, who welcomed me cordially.

Mr. Cazalette proved to be a queer, bald-pated, old-fashioned man, who wore odd clothes. He was eighty years old, but must have been very hardy, for Marcia told me that he bathed in the sea every day, no matter what the weather.

I was not surprised, therefore, when, looking from my window early the next morning, I observed the old gentleman returning to the house with towels draped over his shoulders, but my attention was caught when I saw him suddenly thrust something into a yew hedge. Going out immediately after for a walk before breakfast, I could not refrain from visiting the hedge to see what Cazalette had put there. It was a handkerchief stained brown and red, as if with clay and blood. My first thought was that a shell had cut his foot on the beach; but why should he have thus hidden the bit of linen he had used to stanch the wound?

Presently I had to admit another theory, for a few moments later I came across the body of Salter Quick lying, stabbed to death, on the sands in a pool of blood. Cazalette! His morning dip! The hiding of a blood-stained handkerchief! And I remembered that he had been deeply interested and asked many questions when, the night before, I had told the story of Quick and the other stranger, both in these parts on a precisely similar quest.

When I spread the news, beyond the fact that only a gleam of sudden, almost pleased, interest showed in his eyes, Cazalette was quite impassive. "Well now, that's the very end I was thinking the fellow would come to," he remarked. I thought, of course, of asking for some explanation of the incident of the hedge, but on reflection determined to hold my tongue and bide my time.

Quick's clothes had been searched by the assassin; but in one of the pockets was found a metal tobacco-box quaintly chased and ornamented. This interested Cazalette greatly. He discovered some lines scratched on the inside of the lid with the point of a nail, or a knife. He got permission to photograph the box, and announced his intention of enlarging the print. He appeared to believe the scratches might help solve the murder.

But for the present the mystery was further deepened when news came that Salter's brother Noah, landlord of the Admiral Parker inn, had been found murdered in Saltash, near Devonport, at the same hour the former had met his end. It began to look as if the two were in possession of some secret, and had been done away with by men who were anxious to obtain it for themselves.

A few days later, Miss Raven expressed a desire to see the tobacco-box on which, as a clue, Cazalette appeared to set such store. It had been taken away by the police, and we walked over to the station. When the obliging inspector went to get it, he found it gone. It had last been seen at the inquest, and must have been abstracted at those proceedings.

On the way home, a sudden thunder-storm compelled us to take refuge in the house of Doctor Lorrimore, who was dining at Ravensdene Court the following night. Lorrimore, after twelve years in India, had bought a practise in Alnwick in order to devote himself to certain scientific pursuits with as little interruption as possible. He lived alone with a most inscrutable Chinese servant, whom he had brought from the East and whom he called Wing, which was only one of two or three patronymics. He spoke of Wing as a philosopher, as having an amazing ability to meet any demand or emergency. But I could not help wondering that so clever a chap should be content to bury his talents in such an out-of-the-world spot. We had the opportunity of realizing his culinary abilities through some delicious plum cake which was offered us.

THE next day, when I was going downstairs to dinner, Mr. Cazalette's door opened and he quietly drew me inside his room.

"Middlebrook," he whispered—though he had carefully shut the door—"you're a sensible lad, and I'll acquaint you with a matter. This very morning, as I was taking my bit of a dip, my pocketbook was stolen out of the jacket that I'd left on the shore. Stolen, Middlebrook!"

"Was there anything of great value in it?" I asked.

"Aye; there was!" answered Mr. Cazalette. "There was that in it which, in my opinion, might be some sort of a clue to the real truth about yon man's murder!"

"You lost your pocketbook while you were bathing, Mr. Cazalette?" I asked.

He turned on his bed, pointing to a venerable Norfolk jacket which hung on a peg in a recess by the wash-stand.

"It's my custom," said he, "to array myself in that old coatie when I go for my bit dip, you see—it's thick and it's warm, and I've had it twenty years or more—good tweed it is, and homespun. And whenever I've gone out here of a morning, I put my pocketbook in the inside pocket and laid the coat itself and the rest o' my scanty attire on the bank down there at Kernwick Cove while I went in the water. And I did that very same thing this morning—and when I came to my clothes again, the pocketbook was gone!"

"You saw nobody about?" I suggested.

"Nobody," said he. "But, Lord, man, I know how easy it was to do the thing!

You'll bear in mind that on the right-hand side of that cove, the plantation comes right down to the edge of the bit of cliff—well, a man lurking among the shrubs and undergrowth 'ud have nothing to do but reach his arm to the bank, draw my coatie to his nefarious self and abstract my property."

"And—the clue?" I asked.

He edged a little nearer to me.

"I'm telling you," he said. "Now, you'll let your mind go back to the morning whereon you found yon man Quick lying dead and murdered on the sand. And you'll remember that before ever you were down at the place, I'd been there before you. You'll wonder how it comes about that I didn't find what you found, but, then, there's a many big rocks and boulders standing well up on that beach, and it's very evident that the corpse was obscured from my view by one or other and maybe more of 'em. Anyway, I didn't find Salter Quick—but I did find something that maybe—mind, I'm saying maybe, Middlebrook—had to do with his murder."

"What, Mr. Cazalette?" I asked, though I knew well enough what it was. I wanted him to say, and have done with it; his circumlocution was getting wearisome.

"You'll be aware," he continued, "that there's a deal of gorse and bramble growing right down to the very edge of the coast thereabouts, Middlebrook. Scrub—that sort o' thing. The stuff that, if it catches anything loose, anything protruding from say, the pocket of a garment, 'll lay hold and stick to it. Aye; well, on one of those bushes, gorse or bramble, I cannot rightly say which, just within the entrance to the plantation, I saw, fluttering in the morning breeze that came sharp and refreshing off the face of the water, a handkerchief. And there was two sorts o' stains on it—caused in the one case by mud—the soft mud of the adjacent beach—and in the other by blood. A smear of blood—as if somebody had wiped blood off his fingers, you'll understand. But it was not that, not the blood, made me give my particular attention to the thing, which I'd picked off with my thumb and finger. It was that I saw at once that this was no common man's property, for there was a crest woven into one corner, and a monogram of initials underneath it, and the stuff itself was of a sort that I'm unfamiliar with—it wasn't linen, though it looked like it, and it wasn't silk, for I'm well acquainted with that fabric—maybe it was a mixture of the two, but it had not been woven or made in any British factory. The thing was of foreign origin."

"WHAT were the markings you speak of?" I asked.

"Well, I tell you there was a crest; anyhow, it was a coronet or that make of a thing," he answered. "Woven in one corner—I mean, worked in by hand. And the letters beneath it were a 'V' and a 'de'—small, that last, and a 'C.' Man, that handkerchief was the property of some man of quality! And the stains being wet—the mud stains, at any rate, though the smear of blood was dry—I gathered that it had been but recently deposited, by accident, where I found it. I reckoned it up this way—d'ye see, Middlebrook?—the man who'd left it there had used it on the beach—maybe he'd cut his toe, bathing, or something o' that sort, or likely a cut finger, gathering a shell or a fossil—and had thrust it carelessly into a side pocket, for a thorn to catch hold of as he passed."

"And what did you do with it, Mr. Cazalette?" I inquired, with seeming innocence.

"I slipped it among my towels. But I'm whiles given to absent-mindedness, and not liking that I should put the blood-stained thing down on my dressing-table there and cause the maids to wonder, I just thrust it into a hedge as I was passing along, till I could go back and examine it at my leisure. And when I'd got myself dressed, I went back and took it, and put it in a stout envelope into my pocket—and then you came along, Middlebrook, with your story of the murder, and I saw then that, before saying a word to anybody, I'd keep my own counsel and examine that thing more carefully. And, man alive, I've no doubt whatever that the man who left the handkerchief behind him was the man who knifed Salter Quick."

"I gather, from all you've said, that the handkerchief was in the pocketbook you had stolen this morning," I suggested.

"You're right in that," said he. "Oh, it was! Wrapped up in a bit of oiled paper, and in an envelope, sealed down and attested in my handwriting, Middlebrook—date and particulars of my discovery of it, all in order. Aye; and there was more.

Letters and papers of my own, to be sure, and a trifle money—bank-notes. But there was yet another thing that, in view of all we know, may be a serious thing to have fall into the hands of ill-doers. A print, Middlebrook, of the enlarged photograph I got of the inside of the lid of yon dead man's tobacco-box!"

He regarded me with intense seriousness as he made this announcement, and not knowing exactly what to say, I remained silent.

"Aye!" he continued. "And it's my distinct and solemn belief that it's that the thief was after. Ye see, Middlebrook, it's been spoken of—not widely noised abroad, as you might say, but still spoken of, and things spread, that I was keenly interested in those marks, scratches, whatever they were, on the inside of that lid, and got the police to let me make a photograph, and it's my impression that there's somebody about who's been keenly anxious to know what results I obtained."

"You really think so?" said I. "Why—who could there be?"

"Aye, man, and who could there be, wi' a crest and monogram on his kerchief, that 'ud murder yon man the secret way he was?" he retorted, answering my incredulous look with one of triumph. "Tell me that, my laddie! I'm telling you, Middlebrook, that this was no common murder any more than the murder of the man's own brother down yonder at Saltash, which is a Cornish riverside place, and a good four or five hundred miles away, was a common, ordinary crime. Man, we're living in the very midst of a mystery—and that there's bloody-minded, aye, and bloody-handed men, maybe, within our gates, but surely close by us, is as certain to me as that I'm looking at you!"

"I thought you believed that Salter Quick's murderer was miles away before ever Salter Quick was cold," I observed.

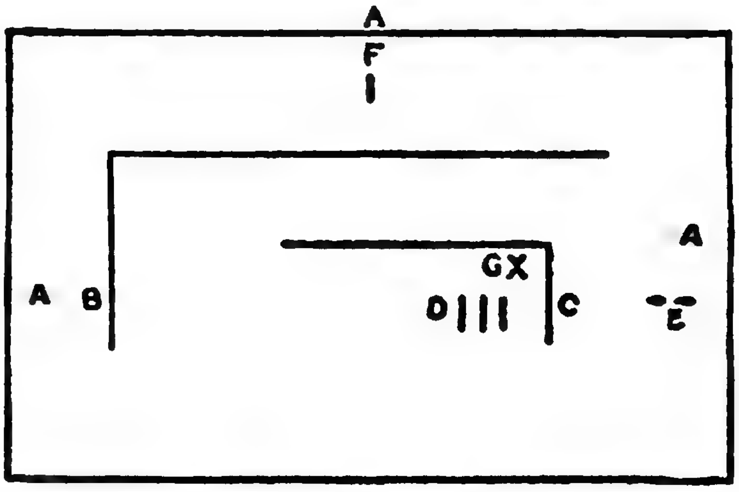
"I did—and I've changed my mind," he answered. "I'm not thinking it any more, and all the less since I was robbed of my venerable pocketbook, with those two exhibits o' the crime in its wame. The murderer is about! And though he mayn't have thought to get his handkerchief, he may have hoped that he'd secure some result o' my labors in the photographic line."

"Mr. Cazalette!" said I, "what were the results of your labors? I don't suppose that the print which was in your pocketbook was the only one you possess."

"You're right there," he replied. "It wasn't. If the thief thought he was securing something unique, he was mistaken. But—I didn't want him, or anybody, to get hold of even one print; for, as sure as we're living men, what was on the inside of that lid was—a key to something!"

"Mr. Cazalette," said I, "I'd just like to see your results."

He got off his bed at that, and going over to a chest of drawers, unlocked one, and took out a writing-case, from which he presently extracted a sheet of cardboard, whereon he had mounted a photograph, beneath which, on the cardboard, were some lines of explanatory writing in his fine, angular style of calligraphy. This is what there was to look at—mere lines, and, at the foot of the photograph, Mr. Cazalette's explanatory notes and suggestions:



AAA Inside rim of the lid of the tobacco-box.
B Outer line, slightly scratched in.
C Inner line, deeply scratched in.
D Three vertical short lines.
E Two marks, obviously parts of figures, the remainder illegible.
F Short vertical line.
G A deeply incised cross.

"I'm as wise as ever, Mr. Cazalette," I said, after studying this for a few moments. "It seems to be a plan. But of what?"

JUST then the dinner-bell rang, and he put the photographic print away, and we went down-stairs. That was the evening on which Doctor Lorrimore was to dine with us—we found him in the hall, talking to Mr. Raven and his niece. Joining them, we found that their subject of conversation was the same that had just engaged Mr. Cazalette and myself—the tobacco-box.

It turned out that the police inspector had been round to Lorrimore's house, inquiring if Lorrimore, who, with the police surgeon, had occupied a seat at the table whereon the Quick relics were laid out at the inquest, had noticed that now missing and consequently all-important object.

Lorrimore was a brilliant and accomplished conversationalist, and the time passed pleasantly until, as we men were lingering a little over our wine, and Miss Raven was softly playing the piano in the adjoining drawing-room, the butler came in and whispered to his master. Raven turned an astonished face to the rest of us.

"There's the police inspector here now," he said, "and with him a detective—from Devonport. They are anxious to see me—and you, Middlebrook. The detective has something to tell."

"SORRY to disturb you, Mr. Raven," said the inspector, with an apologetic bow, "but we are anxious to have a little talk with you and Mr. Middlebrook. This is Mr. Scarterfield—from the police at Devonport."

We made room for them at the table at which we were sitting, and some of us, I think, were impatient to hear what Mr. Scarterfield had to tell. But he betrayed no eagerness to get to business until he had lighted one of Mr. Raven's cigars and pledged Mr. Raven in a whisky and soda. Then he turned a friendly, all-embracing smile on the rest of us.

"I had better tell you how far my investigations have gone," he said quietly. "Then we shall know precisely where we are, and from what point we can, perhaps, make a new departure, now that I have come here. I was put in charge of this case—at least of the Saltash murder—from the first. Now, when the news about Salter Quick came through, it seemed to me that the first thing to do was to find out a very pertinent thing—who were the brothers Quick? What were their antecedents? What was in their past likely to lead up to these crimes?

"When Noah Quick first went to Devonport, he deposited a considerable sum of money with one of the leading banks at Plymouth, and at the time of his death he had several thousand pounds lying there to his credit. His bankers also had charge of valuable securities of his. On Salter Quick's coming to the Admiral Parker, Noah introduced him to this bank; Salter deposited there a sum of about two thousand pounds, and of that he had only withdrawn about a hundred. So he, too, at the time of his death, had a large balance; also, he left with the bankers, for safekeeping, some valuable scrip and securities, chiefly of Indian railways. But the bankers know no more of their antecedents than the solicitors do, which is nothing."

Here the detective, suddenly assuming a more businesslike air than he had previously shown, paused, to produce from his breast-pocket a small bundle of papers, which he laid before him on the table.

"I'll have to tell the story in a sort of sequence," he continued. "This is what I have pieced together from the information I collected at Lloyds: In October, 1907, now nearly five years ago, a certain steamship, the *Elizabeth Robinson*, left Hongkong, in southern China, for Chemulpo, one of the principal ports in Korea. She was spoken in the Yellow Sea several days later. After that she was never heard of again, and, according to the information available at Lloyds, she probably went down in a typhoon in the Yellow Sea and was totally lost, with all hands on board. No great matter, perhaps! From all that I could gather, she was nothing but a tramp steamer that did, so to speak, odd jobs anywhere between India and China; she had gone to Hongkong from Singapore; her owners were small folk in Singapore; and I imagine that she had seen a good deal of active service. All the same, she's of considerable interest to me, for I have managed to secure a list of the names of the men who were on her when she left Hongkong for Chemulpo—and among those names are Noah and Salter Quick."

Scarterfield slipped off the india-rubber band which confined his papers, and, selecting one, slowly unfolded it. Mr. Raven spoke.

"I understood that this ship, the *Elizabeth Robinson*, was lost with all hands?" he said.

"So she is set down at Lloyds," replied Scarterfield.

"Yet—Noah and Salter Quick were on her—and were living five years later," suggested Mr. Raven.

"Just so, sir," agreed Scarterfield dryly. "Therefore, if Noah and Salter Quick were on her, and as they were alive until recently, either the *Elizabeth Robinson* did not go down in a typhoon or from any other reason, or—the brothers Quick escaped. But here is a list of the men who were aboard when she sailed from Hongkong. It includes a master, or captain, and a crew of eighteen—I needn't trouble you with their names, except in two instances, which I'll refer to presently. But here are the names of Noah Quick, Salter Quick—set down as passengers! Nothing in the list of the crew strikes me but the two names I spoke of. The first will have an interest for Mr. Middlebrook. It's Netherfield."

"Netherfield!" I exclaimed. "The name——"

"That Salter Quick asked you particular questions about when he met you on the headlands, Mr. Middlebrook," answered Scarterfield, with a knowing look, "and that he was very anxious to get some news of William Netherfield, deck-hand, of Blyth, Northumberland—that's the name on the list of those who were aboard the *Elizabeth Robinson*."

"Of Blyth?" remarked Mr. Cazalette. "Um. Blyth lies some miles to the southward."

"I'm aware of it, sir," said Scarterfield, "and I propose to visit the place when I have made certain inquiries about this region. But I hope you appreciate the extraordinary coincidence, gentlemen. In October, 1907, Salter Quick is on a tramp steamer in the Yellow Sea in company, more or less intimate, with a sailorman from Blyth, in Northumberland, whose name is Netherfield. In March, 1912, he is on the seacoast near Alnmouth, asking anxiously if anybody knows of a churchyard or churchyards in these parts where people of the name of Netherfield are buried. Why?"

Nobody attempted to answer this question, and presently I put one for myself.

"You spoke of two names on the list as striking you with some significance," I said. "Netherfield is one. What is the other?"

"That of a Chinaman," he replied. "Set down as cook—I'm told most of those coasting steamers in that part of the world carry Chinamen as cooks. Chuh Fen—that's the name. And why it's significant to me, when all the rest aren't, is this: During the course of my inquiries at Lloyds, I learned that about three years ago a certain Chinaman, calling himself Chuh Fen, dropped in at Lloyds and was very anxious to know if the steamer *Elizabeth Robinson*, which sailed from Hongkong for Chemulpo in October, 1907, ever arrived at her destination? He was given the same information that was afforded me, and, on getting it, went away, silent. Now then—was this man, this Chinaman, the Chuh Fen who turned up in London, the same Chuh Fen who was on the *Elizabeth Robinson?* If so, how did he escape a shipwreck which evidently happened? And why—if there was no shipwreck, and something else took place of which we have no knowledge—did he want to know, after two years' lapse of time, if the ship did really get to Chemulpo?"

THERE was a pause then, and something impelled Miss Raven, who had joined us, and myself to glance at Doctor Lorrimore. He nodded—he knew what we were thinking of. And he turned to Scarterfield.

"I happen," he said, "to have a Chinaman in my employ at present—one Wing, a very clever man. He has been with me for some years—I brought him from India, when I came home recently. An astute chap, like——"

He paused suddenly; the detective had turned a suddenly interested glance on him.

"You live hereabouts, sir?" he asked. "I—I don't think I've caught your name?"

"Doctor Lorrimore—our neighbor," said Mr. Raven hurriedly. "Close by."

I think Lorrimore saw what had suddenly come into Scarterfield's mind. He laughed a little cynically.

"Don't get the idea or suspicion formed or half fledged that my man Wing had anything to do with the murder of Salter Quick," he said. "I can vouch for him and his movements—I know where he was on the day of the murder. What I was thinking of was this: Wing is a man of infinite resource and of superior brains. He might be of use to you in tracing this Chuh Fen, if Chuh Fen is in England. When Wing and I were in London—we were there for some time after I returned from India, previous to my coming down here—Wing paid a good many visits to his fellow Chinamen in the East End, Limehouse way; he also had a holiday in Liverpool and another at Swansea and Cardiff, where, I am told, there are Chinese settlements. And I happen to know that he carries on an extensive correspondence with his compatriots. If you think he could give you any information, Mr. Scarterfield——"

"I'd like to have a talk with him, certainly," responded the detective, with some eagerness.

Lorrimore turned to Mr. Raven.

"If your coachman could run across with the dog-cart or anything handy," he said, "and would tell Wing that I want him, here, he'd be with me at once."

HALF AN HOUR passed; then the door was quietly opened, and behind the somewhat pompous figure of the butler I saw the bland, obsequious smile of the Chinaman.

It was Lorrimore who, at the detective's request, explained to Wing why we had sent for him. The Chinaman nodded a grave assent when reminded of the Salter Quick affair—evidently he knew all about it. Then Scarterfield began to ask him questions.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Chuh Fen?" the detective asked.

The Chinaman moved his head very slightly.

"I knew a man named Chuh Fen ten, eleven years ago, before I went to Bombay and entered my present service."

"Where did you know him?"

"Two—perhaps three places," said Wing. "Singapore, Penang, perhaps Rangoon."

"What was he?"

"A cook—very good cook."

"Would you be surprised to hear of his being in England three years ago?"

"Not at all. Many Chinamen come here. I myself—why not others? If Chuh Fen came here three years ago, perhaps he came as cook on some ship trading from China to Burma. Then—go back again."

"I wonder if he did," muttered the detective. "Still," he continued, turning to Wing, "a lot of your people, when they come here, stop, don't they?"

"Many stop in this country," said Wing.

"Laundry business, eating-houses, groceries, and so on?" suggested Scarterfield. "Now, I want to ask you a question. This man I'm talking of, Chuh Fen, was certainly in London three years ago. Are there places and people in London where one could get to hear of him?"

"Where I could get to hear of him—yes," answered Wing.

"You say—where *you* could get to hear of him," remarked Scarterfield. "Does that mean that you would get information which I shouldn't get?"

The very faintest ghost of a smile showed itself in the wrinkles about the Chinaman's eyes. He inclined his head a little, politely, and Lorrimore stepped into the arena.

"What Wing means is that, being a Chinaman himself, naturally he could get news of a fellow Chinaman from fellow Chinamen where you, an Englishman, wouldn't get any at all," he said, with a laugh. "I dare say that if you, Mr. Scarterfield, went down Limehouse way seeking particulars about Chuh Fen, you'd be met with blank faces and stopped ears."

"That's just what I'm suggesting, Doctor," answered the detective good-humoredly. "I'll put the thing in a nutshell—my profound belief is that if we want to get at the bottom of these two murders, we've got to go back a long way, to the *Elizabeth Robinson* time, and that Chuh Fen is the only person I've heard of, up to now, who can throw a light on that episode. And it seems to me, to be plain about it, that Mr. Wing there could be extremely useful."

"How?" asked Lorrimore. "He's at your service, I'm sure."

"Well, by finding out if this Chuh Fen, when he was here, three years since, made any revelations to his Chinese brethren in Limehouse or elsewhere," replied Scarterfield. "He may have known something about the brothers Quick and concerning that *Elizabeth Robinson* affair that would help immensely."

"I know," said Lorrimore. He turned to his servant and addressed him in some strange tongue in which Wing at once responded. For some minutes they talked together volubly; then Lorrimore looked round at Scarterfield.

"Wing says that if Chuh Fen was in London three years ago, he can engage to find out how long he was here, whence he came and why, and where he went," he said. "This he can do for you—he's no doubt of it."

"There's another thing," said Scarterfield: "If Chuh Fen is still in England—as he may be—can he find him?"

Wing's smooth countenance, on hearing this, showed some sign of animation. Instead of replying to the detective, he again addressed his master in the foreign tongue. Lorrimore nodded and turned to Scarterfield with a slightly cynical smile.

"He says that if Chuh Fen is anywhere in England, he can lay hands on him quickly," said Lorrimore. "But he adds that Chuh Fen may have reasons of his own for desiring strict privacy."

"I get you!" said Scarterfield, with a wink. "All right, doctor! If Mr. Wing can unearth Mr. Chuh Fen, and that mysterious gentleman can give me a tip, I'll respect his privacy. So now do we get at something? Do I understand that your man will help us by trying to find out some particulars of Chuh Fen, or laying hands on Chuh Fen himself? All expenses defrayed, you know," he went on, turning to Wing, "and a handsome remuneration if it leads to results. And follow your own plans. I know you Chinamen are smart and deep at this sort of thing."

"Leave it to him," said Lorrimore. "To him and to me. If there's news to be had of this man, Chuh Fen, he'll get it."

"Then that is something done!" exclaimed Scarterfield, rubbing his hands. "Good! I like to see even a bit of progress. But now, while I'm here, and while we're at business—and I hope this young lady doesn't find it dull business—there's another matter: The inspector tells me there have been alarms and excursions about a certain tobacco-box which was found on Salter Quick, that Mr. Cazalette—you, sir, I think—had had various experiments in connection with it, and that the thing has been stolen. Now, I want to know all about that. Who can tell me most?"

SO, FOR the second time that day, Mr. Cazalette told the story of the tobacco-box and of his pocketbook, and produced his photograph.

The rest of us watched Scarterfield as he studied the thing over which Mr. Cazalette and I had exercised our brains in the half-hour before dinner. He seemed to get no more information from a long perusal of it than we had got, and he finally threw it away from him across the table with a muttered exclamation which confessed discomfiture. Miss Raven picked up the photograph.

"Aye!" mumbled Mr. Cazalette. "Let the lassie look at it! Maybe a woman's brains is more use than a man's."

Miss Raven, timid, and a little shy of concentrated attention, laid the photograph again on the table.

"Don't—don't you think there may be some explanation of this in what Salter Quick said to Mr. Middlebrook when they met on the cliffs?" she asked. "He told Mr. Middlebrook that he wanted to find a churchyard where there were graves of people named Netherfield, but he didn't know exactly where it was, though it was somewhere in this locality. Now, suppose this is a rough outline of that churchyard. These outer lines may be the wall—then these little marks may show the situation of the Netherfield graves. And that cross in the corner—perhaps there is something buried, hidden there which Salter Quick wanted to find?"

The detective uttered a sharp exclamation and snatched up the photograph again.

"Good! Good!" he said. "To be sure, that may be it. What's against it?"

"This," remarked Mr. Cazalette solemnly: "That there isn't anybody of the name of Netherfield buried between Alnmouth and Budle Bay. That's a fact."

"Established," added the police inspector, "by as an exhaustive inquiry as anybody could make. It is a fact, as Mr. Cazalette says."

"Well," observed Scarterfield, "but Salter Quick may have been wrong in his locality. You can be sure of this: Whatever secret he held was got from somebody else. He may have been twenty, thirty, even fifty miles out. But we know something—the Netherfield who was with him in the *Elizabeth Robinson* hailed from Blyth, in this county. I'm going to Blyth myself—to-morrow; I'll find out if there are Netherfields buried about there. Personally, I believe Miss Raven's hit the nail on the head. This is a rough chart of a spot Salter Quick wanted to find—where, no doubt, something is hidden. What? Who knows? But—judging from the fact that two men have been murdered for the secret of it—something of great value."

WE HEARD nothing of Scarterfield, the dectective, nor of Wing, pressed into his service, for some days after the consultation in Mr. Raven's dining-room. Then, as we were breakfasting one morning, the post-bag was brought in, and Mr. Raven, opening it, presently handed me a letter in an unfamiliar handwriting, the envelope of which bore the post-mark, Blyth.

NORTH SEA HOTEL,
Blyth, Northumberland.
April 23, 1912.

DEAR SIR:

You will remember that when we were discussing matters the other night round Mr. Raven's table, I mentioned that I intended visiting this town in order to make some inquiries about the man Netherfield who was with the brothers Quick on the *Elizabeth Robinson*. I have been here two days, and I have made some very curious discoveries. And I am now writing to ask you if you could so far oblige and help me in my investigations as to join me here for a day or two at once. The fact is, I want your assistance—I understand that you are an expert in deciphering documents and the like, and I have come across certain things here in connection with this case which are beyond me. I can assure you that, if you could make it convenient to spare me even a few hours of your valuable time, you would put me under great obligations to you.

Yours truly,
THOMAS SCARTERFIELD.

It took me some hours to get to Blyth. But there I was at last, in the middle of the afternoon, and there, on the platform to meet me, was the detective, as rubicund and cheerful as ever.

"I came here, of course," he began, "to see if I could learn anything of a man of this place who answered to what I had already learned about Netherfield of the *Elizabeth Robinson*. I went to the likely people for news, and I very soon found out something. Nobody knew anything of any man, old or young, named William Netherfield. But a good many people—most, if not all people—do know of a man who used to be much in evidence here some years ago—a man of the name of Netherfield Baxter."

"Netherfield Baxter," I repeated. "Not a name to be readily forgotten—once it is known."

"He's not forgotten," said Scarterfield grimly, "and he was well enough known here once upon a time, and not so long since, either. And now, who was Netherfield Baxter? Well, he was the only child of an old tradesman of this town, whose wife died when Netherfield was a mere boy, and who died himself when his son was only seventeen years of age. Old Baxter was a remarkably foolish man. He left all he had to this lad—some twelve thousand pounds—in such a fashion that he came into absolute, uncontrolled possession of it on attaining his twenty-first birthday. Now then, you can imagine what happened. My young gentleman, nobody to say him nay, no father, mother, sister, brother to restrain him or give him a word in season—or a hearty kicking, which would have been more to the purpose—went the pace, pretty considerably. Horses, cards, champagne—you know! The twelve thousand began to melt like wax in a fire, and by the beginning of the year 1904—bear the date in mind, Mr. Middlebrook—Netherfield Baxter was just about on his last legs—he was, in fact, living from hand to mouth. He was then—I've been particular about collecting facts and statistics—just twenty-nine years of age; so, one way or another, he'd made his little fortune last him eight years. He still had good clothes—a very, very taking, good-looking fellow he was, they say—and he'd a decent lodging. But in spring of 1904 he was living on the proceeds of chance betting, and was sometimes very low down, and in May of that year he disappeared, in startlingly sudden fashion, without saying a word to anybody."

Scarterfield paused, looking at me as if to ask what I thought of it. I thought a good deal of it.

"A very interesting bit of life-drama, Scarterfield," said I. "And there have been far stranger things than it would be if this Netherfield Baxter, of Blyth, turned out to be the William Netherfield of the *Elizabeth Robinson*. "You've more to tell?"

"Oh, much more!" he acquiesced. "We're about half-way through the surface-matters. Now then—you're bearing in mind that Netherfield Baxter disappeared, very suddenly, in May, 1904. Perhaps the town didn't make much to-do over his disappearance for a good reason—it was just then in the very midst of what we generally call a nine days' wonder. For some months the Old Alliance Bank here had been in charge of a temporary manager, in consequence of the regular manager's long-continued illness. This temporary manager was a chap named Lester—John Martindale Lester—who had come here from a branch of the same bank at Hexham, across country. Now, this Lester was a young man who was greatly given to going about on a motor-cycle—not so many of those things about then as we see now; he was always tearing about the country, they say, on half-holidays and Saturdays and Sundays. And one evening, careering round a sharp corner, somewhere just outside the town, in the dark, he ran full-tilt into a cart that carried no tail-light and broke his neck. They picked him up dead."

"Well?" said I.

"You're wondering if that's anything to do with Netherfield Baxter's disappearance?" said Scarterfield. "Well, it's an odd thing, but out of all the folk that I've made inquiry of in the town, I haven't come across one yet who voluntarily suggested that it had. But I do. And you'll presently see why I think so. Now, this man, John Martindale Lester, was accidentally killed about the beginning of the first week in May, 1904. Three or four days later, Netherfield Baxter cleared out. I've been careful, in my conversations with the townsfolk—officials, mostly—not to appear to connect Lester's death with Baxter's departure. But that there was a connection, I'm dead certain. Baxter ran away, Mr. Middlebrook, because he knew that Lester's sudden death would lead to an examination of things at the Old Alliance Bank."

"Ah!" said I. "I begin to see things."

"So do I—through smoked glass, though, as yet," assented Scarterfield. "But it's getting clearer. Now, things at the bank were examined—and some nice revelations came forth. To begin with, there was a cash deficiency—not a heavy one, but quite heavy enough. In addition to that, certain jewels were missing, which had been deposited with the bankers for security by a lady in this neighborhood—they were worth some thousands of pounds. And, to add to this, two chests of plate were gone which had been placed with the bank some years before by executors of the will of the late Lord Forestburne, to be kept there till the coming of age of his heir, a minor when his father died. Altogether, Mr. John Martindale Lester and his accomplices, or accomplice, had helped themselves very freely to things until then safe in the vaults and strong room."

"What is thought in the town about Lester and the valuables?" I inquired. "They must have some theory."

"Oh, of course they have!" he replied. "The theory is that Lester had accomplices in London, that he shipped these valuables off there, and that, when his accomplices heard of his sudden death, they—why, they just held their tongues. But my notion is that the only accomplice Lester had was our friend Netherfield Baxter."

"You've some ground?" I asked.

"Yes, or I shouldn't think so," said Scarterfield. "I'm now coming to the reason of my sending for you, Mr. Middlebrook. I told you that this fellow Baxter had a decent lodging in the town. Well, I made it my business to go there yesterday morning, and finding that the landlady was a sensible woman and likely to keep a quiet tongue, I just told her a bit of my business and asked her some questions. Then I found out that Baxter left various matters behind him which she still had—clothes, books (he was evidently a chap for reading and of superior education, which probably accounts for what I'm going to tell you), papers and the like. I got her to let me have a sight of them. And among the papers I found two, which seem to me to have been written hundreds of years ago and to be lists with names and figures in them. My impression is that Lester found them in those chests of plate, couldn't make them out, and gave them to Netherfield Baxter, as being a better educated man—Baxter, I found out, did well at school and could read and write two or three languages. Well now, I persuaded the landlady to lend me these documents for a day or two, and you shall see if you can decipher them."

"Scarterfield," said I, "it strikes me you've possibly hit on a discovery. Suppose this stolen stuff is safely hidden somewhere about. Suppose Netherfield Baxter knew where, and that he's the William Netherfield of the *Elizabeth Robinson*. Suppose that he let the Quicks into the secret."

THEN Scarterfield drew from a big envelope and placed in my hands two folded pieces of time-yellowed parchment.

One glance at the documents showed me that he had accidentally come across a really important find; within another moment I was deeply engrossed, and he saw that I was. Presently, laying the documents on the table, I smiled at him.

"Scarterfield," I said, "are you at all up in the history of your own country?"

"Couldn't say that I am, Mr. Middlebrook."

"But you're up to certain notable episodes?" I suggested. "You know, for instance, that when the religious houses were suppressed—abbeys, priories, convents, hospitals—in the reign of Henry the Eighth, a great deal of their plate and jewels was confiscated to the use of the king?"

"Oh, I've heard that," he admitted. "Nice haul the old chap got, too!"

"He didn't get all," said I. "A great deal of the monastic plate disappeared—clean vanished. It used to be said that a lot of it was hidden away or buried by its owners, but it's much more likely that it was stolen by the covetous and greedy folk of the neighborhood—the big men, of course. Anyway, while a great deal was certainly sent by the commissioners to the king's treasury in London, a lot more—especially in out-of-the-way places and districts—just disappeared and was never heard of again. Have you the least idea of what these documents are?"

"No," he replied; "unless they're lists of something—like inventories."

"They are inventories!" I exclaimed. "Both. Written in crabbed calligraphy, too, but easy enough to read if you're acquainted with sixteenth-century penmanship, spelling and abbreviations. Look at the first one. It is here described as an inventory of all the jewels, plate, etc., appertaining and belonging unto the abbey of Forestburne, and it was made in the year 1536. This abbey, therefore, was one of the smaller houses that came under the two-hundred-pound limit and was accordingly suppressed in the year just mentioned. Now look at the second. It also is an inventory—of the jewels and plate of the priory of Mellerton, made in the same year, and similarly suppressed. But though both these houses were of the smaller sort, it is quite evident, from a cursory glance at these inventories, that they were pretty rich in jewels and plate. By the term 'jewels' is meant plate wherein jewels were set; as to the plate, it was, of course, the sacramental vessels and appurtenances. And, judging by these entries, the whole mass of plate must have been considerable."

"And, in the main, it would be—what?" asked Scarterfield. "Gold? Silver?"

"Some of it gold, some silver, a good deal of it silver gilt," I replied. "I can tell all that by reading the inventories more attentively."

"A great quantity of plate—some of it jeweled!" he soliloquized. "Whew! And what do you make of it?"

"Putting everything together that you've told me," I answered, with some confidence, "I make this of it: This plate, originally church property, came—we won't ask how—into the hands of the late Lord Forestburne, and may have been in possession of his family, hidden away, perhaps, for four centuries. But, at any rate, it was in his possession, and he deposited it with his bankers across the way. He may, indeed, not have known what was in it—again, he may have known. Now, I take it that the dishonest temporary manager you told me of examined those chests, decided to appropriate their valuable contents, and enlisted the services of Netherfield Baxter in his nefarious labors. I think that these inventories were found in the chests—one, probably, in each—and that Baxter kept them out of sheer curiosity—you say he was a fellow of some education. As for the plate, I think he and his associate hid it somewhere—and, if you want my honest opinion, Salter Quick was looking for it."

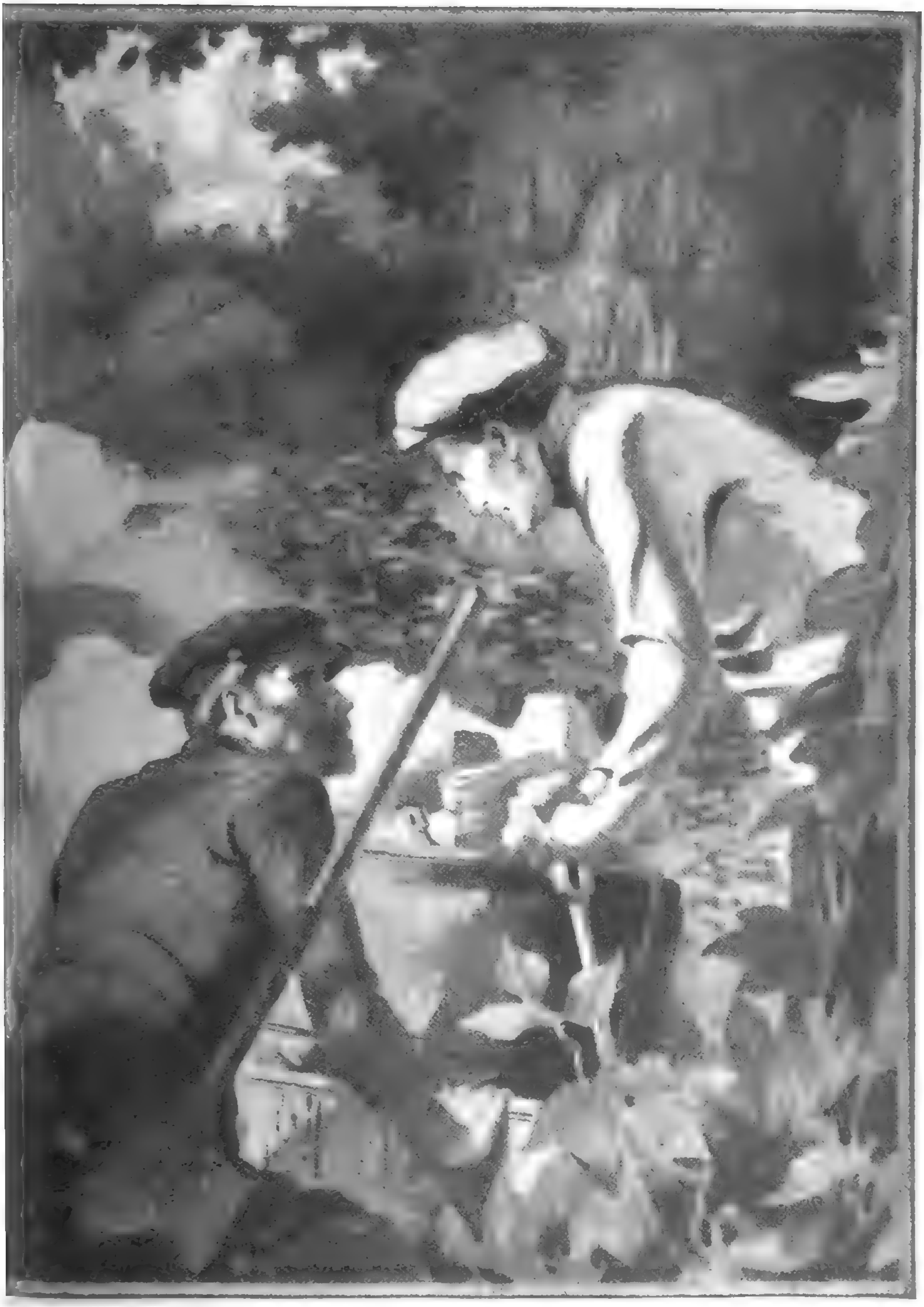
SCARTERFIELD clapped his hand on the table.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "Hanged if I don't think that myself! It's my opinion that this Netherfield Baxter, when he hooked it out of here, got into far regions and strange company, came into touch with those Quicks and told 'em the secret of this stolen plate—he was, I'm sure, the Netherfield of that ship the Quicks were on. Yes, sir; I think we may safely bet on it that Salter Quick was looking for this plate."

"And so was somebody else," said I. "And it was that somebody else who murdered Salter Quick.

"I'm wondering," I continued, "if Noah and Salter, severally or conjointly, had murdered this Netherfield Baxter before

We had walked into this utterly deserted spot to interrupt—what, and who? Befo
came from her lips. "Oh, I say!"



I could say a word. I heard Miss Raven catch her breath; then another sharp exclamation cried. "Who—who are these—these men?"

they themselves were murdered. They—or somebody who was in with them, who afterward murdered them? Do you see?"

"I'm afraid I don't," he said.

"Look you here, Scarterfield," said I: "Supposing a gang of men—men of no conscience, desperate, adventurous men—gets together, as men were together on that ship, the doings and fate of which seem to be pretty mysterious. They're all out for what they can get. One of them is in possession of a valuable secret, and he imparts it to the others, or to some of them, a chosen lot. There have been known such cases—where a secret is shared by say five or six men—in which murder after murder occurs until the secret is only held by one or two. A secret of one is far more valuable than a secret shared with three. But there are things that puzzle me."

"Such as what?" he asked.

"Well, that eagerness of Salter Quick's to find a churchyard with the name Netherfield on the stones," I replied. "And his coming to that part of the Northumbrian coast expecting to find it. Because, so far as the experts know, there is no such name on any stone or in any parish register in all that district. Who, then, told him of the name? You see, if my theory is correct, and Baxter told him and Noah, he'd tell them the exact locality."

"Ah, but would he?" said Scarterfield. "Still, Netherfield it was that Salter asked for."

"That's certain," said I. "And I'm puzzled why. But I'm puzzled still more about another thing: If the men who murdered Noah and Salter Quick were in possession of the secret as well, why did they rip their clothes to pieces, searching for something? Why, later, did somebody steal that tobacco-box from the police."

BEFORE we could say more, one of the hotel servants came into the coffee-room.

"There's a man in the hall asking for Mr. Scarterfield," he announced. "Looks like a seafaring man, sir. He says Mrs. Ormthwaite told him he'd find you here."

"Woman with whom Baxter used to lodge," muttered Scarterfield.

We went out into the hall. There, twisting his a cap in his hands, stood a big, brown-bearded man.

"What's your name?" Scarterfield inquired.

"Fish," replied the visitor promptly. "Solomon. As everybody is aware."

"Blyth man, no doubt," suggested Scarterfield.

"Born and bred, master," said Fish.

"Then you'd know Netherfield Baxter?"

"As a baby—as a boy—as a young man," he declared.

"Just so," said Scarterfield understandingly. "To be sure! You know Baxter quite well, of course." He paused a moment, and then leaned across the table round which the three of us were sitting. "And when did you see him last?" he asked.

Fish, to my surprise, laughed. It was a queer laugh. It suggested that he was puzzled.

"Aye; once," said he. "That's just it, master. And I asks you—and this other gent, which I takes him to be a friend o' yours, and confidential—I asks you, can a man trust his own eyes and his ears?"

"I've always trusted mine, Fish," answered Scarterfield.

"Same here, master, till a while ago," replied Fish. "But now I ain't so mortal sure o' that matter as I was. 'Cause, according to my eyes and according to my ears, I see Netherfield Baxter and I hear Netherfield Baxter inside o' three week."

He brought down his big hand on the table with a hearty smack as he spoke the last word or two.

"What you mean is that the man you took for Baxter said you were mistaken, and that he wasn't Baxter?" suggested Scarterfield. "That it?"

"You puts it very plain, master," assented Fish. "That is what did happen. But if the man I refers to wasn't Netherfield Baxter, well—" He hesitated.

"Well?" said Scarterfield. "What happened? Was he alone?"

"No," replied Fish. "He'd two other men with him. One was a chap about his own age, just as smart as what he was, and dressed similar. T'other was an older man, in his shirt-sleeves and without a hat—seemed to me he'd brought Baxter and his friend across from some shop or other to stand 'em a drink. Anyways, he did call for drinks—whisky and soda—and the three on 'em stood together, talking. And as soon as I heard Baxter's voice, I was dead sure about him—he'd always a highish voice, talked as gentlemen talks."

"What were these three talking about?" asked Scarterfield.

"Far as I could make out about ship's fittings," answered Fish. "Something o' that sort, anyway; but I didn't take much notice o' their talk. I was too much taken up watching Baxter, and growing more certain every minute—d'ye see?—that it was him. And 'cepting that a few o' years does make a bit o' difference, and that he's grown a beard, I didn't see no great alteration in him. Yet I see one thing."

"Aye?" asked Scarterfield. "What now?"

"A scar on his left cheek," replied Fish. "What begun underneath his beard, as covered most of it, and went up to his cheekbone. Just an inch or so showing, d'ye understand? 'That's been knife's work!' thinks I to myself. Struck me then he'd grown a beard to hide it."

"Very likely," assented Scarterfield. "Well, and what happened?"

"I waited and watched," continued Fish. "Now, I see two or three little things about this man as I remembered about Baxter. There was a way he had of chucking up his chin—there it was! Another of playing with his watch-chain when he talked—it was there. And of slapping his leg with his walking-stick—that was there, too. 'Jim,' I says to my mate, 'if that ain't a man I used to know, I'm a Dutchman!' Which, of course, I ain't. And so, when the three of 'em sets down their glasses and turns to the door, I jumps up and makes for my man, holding out a hand to him, friendly. And then, of course, come all the surprise.

"'Morning, Mr. Baxter!' says I. 'It's a long time since I had the pleasure o' seeing you, sir!'—and as I say, shoves my hand out, hearty. He turns and gives me a hard, keen look—not taken aback, mind you, but searching-like. 'You're mistaken, my friend,' he says, quiet but pleasant. 'You're taking me for somebody else.' 'What!' says I, all of a heap. 'Ain't you Mr. Netherfield Baxter, what I used to know at Blyth, away up north?' 'That I'm certainly not,' says he, as cool as the north pole. 'Then I ax your pardon, sir,' says I, 'and all I can say is that I never see two gentlemen so much alike in all my born days, and hoping no offense.' 'None at all,' says he, as pleasant as might be. 'They say everybody has a double.' And at that he gives me a polite nod, and out he goes with his pals, and I turns back to Shanks. 'Jim,' says I, 'don't let me ever trust my eyes and ears no more, Jim!' I says. 'I'm a-breaking up, Jim—that's what it is. Thinking I sees things when I don't.' 'Stow all that!' says Jim, what's a practical sort o' man. 'You was only mistook,' says he. 'I've been in that case more than once,' he says. 'Wherever there's a man, there's another somewheres that's as like him as two peas is like each other. Let's go home to dinner,' he says. So we went off to the lodgings, and at first I was sure I'd been mistaken. But later, and now—well, I ain't. That there man was Netherfield Baxter!"

"You saw no more of him in Hull, of course?" suggested Scarterfield.

"Yes, I did," answered Fish. "I saw him again that night. And—as regards one of 'em, at any rate—in queerish company."

"What was that?" asked Scarterfield.

"What I seen plenty of, time and again, in various parts o' this here world, and ain't so mighty fond o' seeing," answered Fish, with a scowl. "A chink!"

"A—what?" demanded the detective. "A—chink?"

"He means a Chinaman," I said.

"That's it, guv'nor," assented Fish. "But, mind you—and here's the queer part of it—he wasn't no common Chinaman. Not the sort that you'll see by the score down Limehouse way or in Liverpool or in Cardiff—not at all. Lord bless you, this here chap was smarter dressed than t'other two! Swell-made dark clothes, gold-handled umbrella, kid gloves on his blooming hands, and a silk top-hat—a reg'lar dude! But—a chink!"

When Fish had gone, Scarterfield turned to me.

"There!" he said. "What d'you think of that, Mr. Middlebrook?"

"What do you think of it?" I suggested.

"I think that Netherfield Baxter is alive and active and up to something," he answered. "And I'd give a good deal to know who that Chinaman is who was with him. I'm off to Hull. Come with me?"

Until that instant such an idea had never entered my head. But I made up my mind there and then.

"I will!" said I. "We'll see this through, Scarterfield. Get a time-table."

GOING southward by way of Newcastle and York, we got to Hull that night, late—too late to do more than eat our suppers and go to bed at the station hotel. And we took things leisurely next morning, breakfasting late and strolling through the older part of the town before, as noon drew near, we approached the Goose and Crane, where Fish said he had seen Baxter. We had an object in selecting time and place. Fish had told us that the man whom he had seen in company with our particular quarry, the supposed Baxter, had come into the queer old inn in his shirt-sleeves and without his hat—he was therefore probably some neighboring shop- or storekeeper, and in the habit of turning into the ancient hostelry for a drink about noon: Such a man—that man—Scarterfield hoped to encounter. Out of him, if he met him, he could hope to get some news.

We easily found the particular room of which Solomon Fish had spoken—there was the door, half open, with its legend on an upper panel in faded gilt letters: "For Master Mariners Only." But, as we had inferred, that warning had been set up in the old days, and was no longer a strict observance; we went into the room unquestioned by guardians or occupants, and, calling for refreshments, sat ourselves down.

Very soon there, entered a shortish, stiffly built, paunchy man, with a beefy face, shrewd eyes, and a bristling iron-gray mustache—a well-dressed man, and sporting a fine gold chain and a diamond pin in his cravat. But—in his shirt-sleeves, and without a hat.

After he had finished his refreshment, he nodded to the company and bustled out as quickly as he had entered. Scarterfield gave me a look, and we left the room in his wake, following him.

Our quarry bustled down the alley, turned the corner into the old High Street and presently crossed the narrow roadway and turned into an office, over the window of which was a sign: "Jallanby, Ship-Broker." He had only got a foot across his threshold, however, when Scarterfield was at his elbow, pulling out his pocketbook and producing his official card.

"You'll see who I am from that," he remarked. "This gentleman's a friend of mine—just now giving me some professional help. I take it you're Mr. Jallanby?"

"Yes; I'm Mr. Jallanby," he answered. "Come inside, gentlemen." He led the way into a dark, rather dismal and dusty little office, and signed to a clerk who was writing there to go out. "What is it, Mr. Scarterfield?" he asked. "Some information?"

"You've hit it, sir," replied Scarterfield. "That's just what we do want; we came here to Hull on purpose to find you, believing you can give it. From something we heard only yesterday afternoon, Mr. Jallanby, a long way from here, we believe that one morning about three weeks ago you were in the Goose and Crane, in that very room where we saw you just now, in company with two men—smartly dressed men, in blue-serge suits and straw hats—one of them with a pointed golden-brown beard. Do you remember? I'm not sure of the identity of one of these men—it's but one I want to trace at present, though I should like to know who the other is. But—if my man is the man I believe him to be, there's a matter of robbery, and possibly of murder. So you see how serious it is. Now, I'll jog your memory a bit. Do you remember that one morning, as you and these two men were leaving the Goose and Crane, a big seafaring-looking man stepped up to the bearded man you were with and claimed acquaintance with him as being one Netherfield Baxter?"

Jallanby started.

"I do!" he exclaimed. "Well enough! I stood by. But—he said he wasn't. There was a mistake."

"I believe there was no mistake," said Scarterfield. "I believe that man is Netherfield Baxter. And—it's Netherfield Baxter I want. Now, Mr. Jallanby, what do you know of those two? In confidence!"

"Well, the man with the brownish beard called himself Mr. Norman Belford," answered Jallanby. "I gathered he was from London. The other man was a Frenchman—some French lord or other, from his name, but I forget it. Mr. Belford always called him 'Vicomte'—which I took to be French for our 'viscount'."

Scarterfield turned and looked at me. And I, too, looked at him. We were thinking of the same thing—old Cazalette's find on the bush in the scrub near the beach at Ravensdene Court. And I could not repress an exclamation.

"The handkerchief!"

Scarterfield coughed. A dry, significant cough—it meant a great deal. He turned to the ship-broker.

"Mr. Jallanby," he continued, "what did these two want of you?"

"I can tell you that in a very few words," answered Jallanby. "Simple enough, and straight enough on the surface. So far as I was concerned, anyhow. They came in here one morning, told me they were staying at the station hotel, and said that they wanted to buy a small craft of some sort that a small crew could run across the North Sea to the Norwegian fiords—the sort of thing you can manage with three or four, you know. They said they were both amateur yachtsmen.

"Well, it so happened that I'd just the very thing they seemed to want," continued the ship-broker. "A vessel that had recently been handed over to me for disposal, and then lying in the Victoria Dock. Ready any day. Only just wanted tidying up and storing. As a matter of fact, she'd been in use quite recently, but she was a bit too solid for her late owner's tastes—the truth was, she'd been originally built for a Penzance fishing-lugger—splendid seagoing boats, those!"

"Do I understand that this vessel could undertake a longish voyage?" asked Scarterfield. "For instance, could they have crossed, say, the Atlantic in her?"

"Atlantic? Lord bless you, yes!" replied the ship-broker. "Or Pacific, either."

"Did they buy her?" asked Scarterfield.

"They did—at once," replied Jallanby. "And paid the money for her—in cash, there and then."

"And then went off—to Norway?"

"So I understand," assented Jallanby. "That's what they said. They were going, first of all, to Stavanger—then to Bergen—then farther north."

"Just the two of them?"

"Why, no," replied Jallanby. "They were joined, a day or two before they sailed, by a friend of theirs—a Chinaman. Queer combination — Englishman, Frenchman, Chinaman. But this Chinaman, he was a swell—what we should call a gentleman, you know—Mr. Belford told me, in private, that he belonged to the Chinese ambassador's suite in London."

"Ah," said Scarterfield, with deep significance, "it's a queer world! But two questions—first, how long since is it that these chaps sailed for Bergen; second, what is the name of this smart little vessel?"

"They sailed precisely three weeks ago next Monday," answered the ship-broker, "and the name of the vessel is the *Blanchflower*."

We left Mr. Jallanby then, promising to see him again, and went away. I waited with some curiosity for the detective to speak.

"Now, I wonder where those chaps have gone," he muttered. "Of course they haven't gone to Norway. Of course that Chinese chap wasn't from the Chinese embassy in London. The whole thing's a bluff. By this time they'll have altered the name of that yawl, and gone—where? In search of that buried stuff, to be sure!"

"Scarterfield," said I, feeling convinced on the matter, "if the man's Baxter, and he's after that stuff, he's gone north. The stuff is near Blyth. Dead certain!"

So that afternon, after seeing the ship-broker again, and making certain arrangements with him in case he heard anything of the *Blanchflower* and her crew of three queerly assorted individuals, we retraced our steps northward. But while Scarterfield turned off at Newcastle for Tynemouth and Blyth, I went forward alone, for Alnwick and Ravensdene Court.

BEING very late in the evening when I arrived at Alnwick, I remained there for that night, and it was not until noon of the next day that I once more reached Ravensdene Court. Lorrimore was there; he had come over to lunch, and for the moment I hoped that he had brought some news from his Chinese servant. But he had heard nothing of Wing since his departure. It would hardly be Wing's method, he said, to communicate with him by letter.

"And yourself, Middlebrook?" asked Mr. Raven. "What did the detective want, and what have you found out?"

I told them the whole story as we sat at lunch. They were all deeply absorbed, but no one so much as Mr. Cazalette, who gave my tale of the doings at Blyth and Hull his undivided attention. And when he had heard me out, he slipped away in silence and disappeared into the library.

Presently he came back into the room carrying a couple of fat quarto books under one arm and a large folio under the other.

"Before you go any further," said he, laying down his burdens, "there are one or two things I should like to draw your attention to in connection with what Middlebrook told us before I left the room just a while since. Now, about that monastic plate, Middlebrook, of which you've seen the inventories—you may not be aware of it, but there's a reference to that matter in Dryman's 'History of the Religious Foundations of Northumberland' which I will now read to you. Hear you this, now:

> "*Abbey of Forestburne*—It is well known that the altar-vessels, plate and jewels of this house were considerable in number and in value, but were never handed over to the custodians of the King's Treasury House in London. They were duly inventoried by the receivers in these parts, and there are letters extant recording their dispatch to London. But they never reached their destination, and it is commonly believed that, like a great deal more of the monastic property of the Northern districts, these valuables were appropriated by high-placed persons of the neighborhood, who employed their underlings, marked and disguised, to waylay and despoil the messengers entrusted to carry them Southward. N.B.—The foregoing remarks apply to the plate and jewels which appertained to the adjacent priory of Mellerton, which were also of great value.

"So," continued Mr. Cazalette, "there's no doubt, in my mind, anyway, that the plate of which Middlebrook saw the inventories is just what they describe it to be, and that it came, in course of time, into the hands of the Lord Forestburne who deposited it in yon bank. And now," he went on, opening the biggest of his volumes, "here's the file of a local paper which your respected predecessor, Mr. Raven, had the good sense to keep, and I've turned up the account of the inquest that was held at Blyth on yon dishonest bank-manager. And there's a bit of evidence here that nobody seems to have drawn Scarterfield's attention to. 'The deceased gentleman,' it reads, 'was very fond of the sea, and frequently made excursions along our beautiful coast in a small yacht which he hired from Messrs. Capsticks, the well-known boat-builders of the town. It will be remembered that he had a particular liking for night sailing, and would often sail his yacht out of harbor late of an evening in order, as he said, to enjoy the wonderful effects of moonlight on sea and coast.' That, you'll bear in mind," concluded Mr. Cazalette, with a more than usually sardonic grin, "was penned by some fatuous reporter before they knew that the deceased gentleman had robbed the bank. And no doubt it was on those night excursions that he and this man Baxter that we've heard of carried away the stolen valuables and safely hid them in some quiet spot on this coast—and there, you'll see, they'll be found all in good time. And as sure as my name is what it is, Doctor Lorrimore, it was that spot that Salter Quick was after—only, he wasn't exactly certain where it was, and had somehow got mixed about the graves of the Netherfields. Man alive, yon plate of the old monks is buried under some Netherfield headstone at this minute!"

DURING the next few days I heard nothing from Scarterfield; indeed, nobody heard anything new from anywhere. I believe that Scarterfield, from Blyth, gave some hints to the coast-guard people about keeping a lookout for the *Blanchflower*, but I am not sure of it. However, two of us at Ravensdene Court took a mutual liking for walks along the loneliest stretches of the coast—myself and Miss Raven. We had some vague idea that we might possibly discover something—perhaps find some trace, we knew not of what. Then we were led, unexpectedly, as such things always do happen, to the threshold of our great and perilous adventure. Going further afield than usual one day, and, about five o'clock of a spring afternoon, straying into a solitary ravine that opened up before us on the moors, we came upon an ancient wood of dwarf oak, so venerable and time-worn in appearance that it looked like a survival of the Druid age.

The wood, into which we made our way, was well-nigh impregnable; it seemed to me that for age upon age its undergrowth had run riot, untrimmed, unchecked, until at last it had become a matted growth of interwoven, strangely twisted boughs and tendrils. It was only by turning in first one then another direction through it that we made any progress in the direction we desired.

All about us the silence was intense; there was no singing of birds or humming of insects in that wood. But more than once we came across bones—the whitened skeletons of animals that had sought these shades and died there, or had been dragged into them and torn to pieces by their fellow beasts. Altogether there was an atmosphere of eeryness and gloom in that wood, and I began—more for my companion's sake than my own—to long for a glimpse of some outlet, a sight of the sunlit sea beyond.

And then at the end of quite half an hour's struggling, borne, I must say, by Miss Raven with the truly sporting spirit which was a part of her general character, a sudden exclamation from her, as she pushed her way through a clump of wilding a little in advance of me, caused me to look ahead.

"There's some building just in front of us!" she said. "See—gray stones—a ruin!"

"That's something to make for, anyway," I said. "Some old tower or other. Yet I don't remember anything of the sort, marked on the maps."

We pushed forward and came out on a little clearing. Immediately in front of us stood the masonry of which we had caught glimpses—a low, squat, square tower, some forty feet in height, ruinous as to the most part, but having the side facing us nearly perfect, and still boasting a fine old doorway which I set down as of Norman architecture. North of this lay a mass of fallen masonry, a long line of grass-grown, weed-encumbered stone, which was evidently the ruin of a wall; here and there in the clearing were similar smaller masses. Rank weed, bramble-bush, beds of nettles encumbered the whole place; it was a scene of ruin and desolation. But a mere glance was sufficient to show me that we had come by accident on a once sacred spot.

"Why this," said I, as we paused at the edge of the wood, "this is the ruin of some ancient church, or perhaps of a religious house. Look at the niche there above the arch of the door—there's been an image in that—and at the general run of the stone lying about. Certainly this is an old church. Why have we never heard of it?"

We began to look about the clearing. The tower was almost gone as to three sides of it; the fourth was fairly intact. A line of fallen masonry lay to the north and was continued a little on the east, where it rose into a higher, ivy-covered mass. Within this again was another, less obvious line, similar in plan, and also covered with unchecked growth; within that, the uneven surface of the ground was thickly encumbered with rank weed, beds of thistle, beds of nettle and a plenitude of bramble and gorse; in one place toward the eastern mass of overgrown wall a great clump of gorse had grown to such a height and thickness as to form an impenetrable screen. And, peering and prying about, suddenly we came, between this screen and the foot of the tower, on signs of great slabs of stone, over the edges of which the coarse grass had grown, and whose surfaces were thickly encumbered with moss and lichen.

"Gravestones!" said Miss Raven. "But—I suppose they're quite worn and illegible."

I GOT down on my knees at one of the slabs less encumbered than the others and began to tear away the grass and weed. There was a rich, thick carpet of moss on it, and a fringe of gray, clinging lichen, but by the aid of a stout pocket-knife I forced it away and laid bare a considerable surface of the upper half of the stone. And now that the moss, which had formed a sort of protecting cover, was removed, we saw lettering, worn and smoothed at its edges in common with the rest of the slab, but still to be made out with a little patience.

There may be—probably is—a certain density in me, a slowness of intuition and perception, but it is the fact that, at this time and for some minutes later, I had not the faintest suspicion that we had accidentally lighted upon something connected with the mystery of Salter Quick. All I thought of, I think, just then was that we had come across some old relic of antiquity—the church of some coast hamlet or village which had long been left to the ruinous work of time, and my only immediate interest was in endeavoring to decipher the half-worn-out inscription on the stone by which I was kneeling. While my companion stood by me, watching with eager attention, Is craped out the earth and moss and lichen from the lettering—fortunately it had been deeply incised in the stone, a hard and durable sort—and much of it remained legible once the rubbish had been cleared from it. Presently I made out at any rate several words and figures:

Hic jacet dominus
Humfrey de Knaythville
quond' vicari huius
ecclesiæ qui obit
anno dni mccccxix

Beneath these lines were two or three others, presumably words of Scripture, which had evidently become worn away before the moss spread its protecting carpet over the others. But we had learned something.

"There we are!" said I, regarding the result of my labors with proud satisfaction. "There it runs—'Here lies the lord, or master, Humphrey de Knaythville, sometime vicar of this church, who died in the year of our Lord one thousand four hundred and nineteen'—over five hundred years ago! A good find!"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Miss Raven, already excited to enthusiasm by these antiquarian discoveries. "I wonder if there are inscriptions on the other tombs."

"No doubt," I assented. "And perhaps some other things of interest on this fallen masonry. This place is well worth careful examination, and I'm wondering how it is that I haven't come across any reference to it in the local books. But, to be sure, I haven't read them very fully or carefully. Mr. Cazalette may know of it. We shall have something to tell him."

We began to look round again. I wandered into the base of the tower; Miss Raven began to explore the weed-choked ground toward the east end. Suddenly I heard a sharp, startled exclamation from her. Turning, I saw her standing by the great clump of overgrown gorse of which I have already spoken. She glanced at me, then at something behind the gorse.

"What is it?" I asked.

Unconsciously she lowered her voice, at the same time glancing half nervously at the thick undergrowth of the wood.

"Come here!" she said. "Come!"

I went across the weed-grown surface to her side. She pointed behind the gorse bush.

"Look there!" she whispered.

I KNEW, as soon as I looked, that we were not alone in that wild, solitary-seeming spot; that there were human ears listening and human eyes watching. We were probably in danger. There, behind the yellow-starred clump of green, was what at first sight appeared to be a newly opened grave, but was in reality a freshly dug excavation; a heap of soil and stone, just flung out, lay by it. On this some hand had flung down a mattock; near it rested a pick. And suddenly, as by a heaven-sent inspiration, I saw things. We had stumbled on the graveyard which Salter Quick had wished to find; de Knaythville and Netherfield were identical terms which had got mixed up in his uneducated mind; here the missing treasure was buried, and we had walked into this utterly deserted spot to interrupt—what, and who?

Before I could say a word, I heard Miss Raven catch her breath; then another sharp exclamation came from her lips—stifled, but clear.

"Oh, I say!" she cried. "Who—who are these—these men?"

Turning quickly in the direction she indicated, I became aware of the presence of two men who had quietly stepped out from the shelter of the high undergrowth on the landward side of the clearing and stood silently watching us. They were attired in something of the fashion of seamen, in rough trousers and jerseys, but I saw at first glance that they were not common men. Indeed, I saw more, and realized, with a sickening feeling of apprehension, that our wanderings into that place had brought us face to face with danger. One of the two, a tallish, slenderly built, good-looking man, not at all unpleasant to look on if it had not been for a certain sinister and cold expression of eye and mouth, I recognized as a stranger whom I had noticed at the coroner's inquest on Salter Quick and had then taken for some gentleman of the neighborhood. The other, I felt sure, was Netherfield Baxter. There was the golden-brown beard of which Fish had told me and Scarterfield; there, too, was the half-hidden scar on the left cheek. I had no doubt whatever that Miss Raven and myself were in the hands of the two men who had bought the *Blanchflower* from Jallanby, the ship-broker of Hull.

The four of us stood steadily gazing at each other for what seemed to be a long and —to me—a painful minute. Then the man whom I took to be Baxter moved a little nearer to us; his companion, hands in pockets, but watchful enough, lounged after him.

"Well, sir?" said Baxter, lifting his cap as he glanced at Miss Raven. "Don't think me too abrupt or intentionally rude if I ask you what you and this young lady are doing here."

His voice was that of a man of education and even of refinement, and his tone polite enough; there was something of apology in it. But it was also sharp, businesslike, compelling; I saw at once that this was a man whose character was essentially matter of fact, and who would not allow himself to stick at trifles, and I judged it best to be plain in my answer.

"If you really want to know," I replied, "we are here by sheer accident. Exploring the wood for the mere fun of the thing, we chanced upon these ruins and have been examining them—that's all."

"You didn't come here with any set purpose?" he asked, looking from one to the other. "You weren't seeking this place?"

"Certainly not!" said I. "We hadn't the faintest notion that such a place was to be found."

"But here it is, anyway," he said. "And—there you are! In possession of the knowledge of it. And so—you'll excuse me—I must ask a question. Who are you? Tourists? Or—do you live hereabouts?"

The other man made a remark under his breath, in some foreign language, eying me the while. And Baxter spoke again, also watching me.

"I think you, at any rate, are a resident," he said. "My friend has seen you before in these parts."

"I have seen him," I said unthinkingly. "I saw him among the people at Salter Quick's inquest."

The faintest shadow of an understanding glance passed between the two men, and Baxter's face grew stern.

"Just so," he remarked. "That makes it all the more necessary to repeat my question. Who are you—both?"

"My name is Middlebrook, if you must know," I answered. "And I am not a resident of these parts—I am visiting here. As for this lady, she is Miss Raven, the niece of Mr. Francis Raven, of Ravensdene Court. And, really——"

He waved his hand as if to deprecate any remonstrance or threat on my part, and bowed as politely to my companion as if I had just given him a formal introduction to her.

"No harm shall come to you, Miss Raven," he said, with evidently honest assurance. "None whatever."

"Nor to Mr. Middlebrook, either, I should hope!" exclaimed Miss Raven, almost indignantly.

He smiled, showing a set of very white, strong teeth.

"That depends on Mr. Middlebrook," he said. "If Mr. Middlebrook behaves like a good and reasonable boy— Mr. Middlebrook," he went on, interrupting himself and turning on me with a direct look, "a plain question: Are you armed?"

"Armed!" I retorted scornfully. "Do you think I carry a revolver on an innocent country stroll?"

"We do," he answered, with another smile. "You see, we don't know with whom we may meet. It was a million to one—perhaps more—against our meeting anybody this afternoon; yet—we've met you."

"We are sorry to have interrupted you," I said, not without a touch of satirical meaning. "We won't interrupt any longer if you will permit us to say good-day."

I motioned to Miss Raven to follow me, and made to move. But Baxter laughed a little and shook his head.

"Miss Raven—Mr. Middlebrook," he said, "I'm sorry, but we can't let you go. The fact is, you've had the bad luck to light on a certain affair of ours about which we can't take any chances. We have a yacht lying outside here—you'll have to go with us on board and remain there for a day or two. I assure you no harm shall come to either of you. And as we want to get on with our work here, will you please to come now?"

WE WENT—silently. There was nothing else to do. In a similar silence they led us through the rest of the wood, along the side of a stream to a small boat that lay hidden at the mouth of the creek. As they rowed us away in it and rounded a spit of land, we saw the yacht, lying under a bluff of the cliffs. Ten minutes' stiff pulling brought us alongside—and for a moment, as I glanced up at her rail, I saw the yellow face of a Chinaman looking down on us. Then it vanished.

We stood idle, like prisoners awaiting orders, while our captors transferred from the boat to the yawl two biggish iron-hooped chests, the wood of which was stained and discolored with earth and clay. They were heavy chests, and they used tackle to get them aboard. I looked at them with a good deal of interest; then, remembering that Miss Raven was fully conversant with all that Scarterfield had discovered at Blyth, I touched her elbow.

"Those are the chests that disappeared from the bank at Blyth," I whispered. "Now you understand?"

She gave me a comprehending look.

"Then we are in the hands of Netherfield Baxter," she murmured. "That man—there?"

"Without a doubt," I answered. "And the thing is—show no fear."

"I'm not a scrap afraid," she answered. "It's exciting! And he's rather interesting, isn't he?"

"Gentlemen of his kidney usually are, I believe," I replied. "All the same, I should much prefer his room to his company."

BAXTER just then came over to us, rubbing from his fingers the soil which had gathered on them from handling the chests. He smiled politely.

"Now, Miss Raven," he said, with an accent of almost benevolent indulgence, "as we shall be obliged to inflict our hospitality upon you for a day or two—I hope it won't be for longer, for your sake—let me show you what we can give you in the way of quarters to yourself. We can't offer you the services of a maid, but there is a good cabin, well fitted, in which you'll be comfortable, and you can regard it as your own domain while you're with us. Come this way."

He led us down a short gangway, across a sort of small saloon evidently used as common room by himself and his companion, and threw open the door of a neat though very small cabin.

"Never been used," he said, with another smile. "Fitted up by the previous owner of this craft, and all in order, as you see. Consider it as your own, Miss Raven, while you're our guest. One of my men shall see that you've whatever you need in the way of towels, hot water and the like. If you'll step in and look round, I'll send him to you now. As he's a Chinaman, you'll find him as handy as a French maid. Give him any orders or instructions you like. And then come on deck again, if you please, and you shall have some tea."

He beckoned me to follow him as Miss Raven walked into her quarters, and he gave me a reassuring look as we crossed the outer cabin.

"Mr. Raven," said I, "will be in great anxiety about his niece. She is the only relative he has, I believe, and he will be extremely anxious if she does not return this evening. He is a nervous, highly strung man——"

He interrupted me with a wave of his hand.

"I've thought of all that," he said. "Mr. Raven shall not be kept in anxiety. As a matter of fact, my friend, whom you met with me up there at the ruins, is going ashore again in a few minutes. He will go straight to the nearest telegraph office, which is a mile or two inland, and there he will send a wire to Mr. Raven—from you. Mr. Raven will get it by, say, seven o'clock. The thing is, how will you word it?"

We looked at each other. In that exchange of glances I could see that he was a man who was quick at appreciating difficulties and that he saw the peculiar niceties of the present one.

"That's a pretty stiff question," said I.

"Just so," he agreed. "It is. So take my advice. Instead of having the wire sent from the nearest office, do this—my friend, as a matter of fact, is going on by rail to Berwick: Let him send a wire from there; it will only mean that Mr. Raven will get it an hour or so later. Say that you and Miss Raven find you cannot get home to-night, and that she is quite safe—word it in any reassuring way you like."

I gave him a keen glance.

"Can we get home to-morrow?"

"Well, possibly to-morrow night—late," he answered. "I will do my best. I may be—I hope to be—through with my business to-morrow afternoon. Then——"

At that moment, the other man appeared on deck, emerging from somewhere. He had changed his clothes—he now presented himself in a smart tweed suit, Homburg hat, polished shoes, gloves, walking-cane. Baxter signed to him to wait, turning to me.

"That's the wisest thing to do," he remarked. "Draft your wire."

I wrote out a message which I hoped would allay Mr. Raven's anxieties and handed it to him. He read it over, nodded as if in approbation, and went across to the other man. For a moment or two they stood talking in low tones; then the other man went over the side, dropped into the boat which lay there and pulled himself off shoreward. Baxter came back to me.

SUDDENLY I made up my mind to speak out. It might be foolish, even dangerous, to do it, but I had an intuitive feeling that it would be neither.

"I believe," I said, bruskly enough, "that I am speaking to Mr. Netherfield Baxter."

He returned me a sharp glance which was half smiling. Certainly there was no astonishment in it.

"Aye," he answered. "I thought, somehow, that you might be thinking that. Well, and suppose I admit it, Mr. Middlebrook? What then? And what do you—a Londoner, I think you told me—know of Netherfield Baxter?"

"You wish to know?" I asked. "Shall I be plain?"

"As a pikestaff, if you like," he replied. "I prefer it."

"Well," said I, "a good many things—recently discovered by accident. That you formerly lived at Blyth, and had some association with a certain temporary bank-manager there, about whose death—and the disappearance of some valuable portable property—there was a good deal of concern manifested about the time that you left Blyth. That you were never heard of again until recently, when a Blyth man recognized you in Hull, where you bought a yawl—this yawl, I believe—and said you were going to Norway in her. And that—But am I to be still more explicit?"

"Why not?" said he, with a laugh. "Forewarned is forearmed. You're giving me valuable information."

"Very well, Mr. Baxter," I continued, determined to show him my cards. "There's a certain detective, one Scarterfield, a sharp man, who is very anxious to make your acquaintance. For if you want the plain truth, he believes you, or some of your accomplices, or you and them together, to have had a hand in the murders of Noah and Salter Quick. And—he's on your track."

I was watching him still more closely as I spoke the last sentence or two. He remained as calm and cool as ever, and I was somewhat taken aback by the collected fashion in which he not only replied to my glance but answered my words.

"Scarterfield—of whose doings I've heard a bit—has got hold of the wrong end of the stick there, Mr. Middlebrook," he said quietly. "I had no hand in murdering either Noah Quick or his brother Salter. Nor had my friend—the man who's just gone off with your telegram. I don't know who murdered those men. But I know that there have always been men who were ready to murder them if they got the chance, and I wasn't the least surprised to hear that they had been murdered. The wonder is that they escaped murder as long as they did. But beyond the fact that they were murdered, I know nothing—nor does anybody on board this craft. You and Miss Raven are among—well, you can call us pirates if you like, buccaneers, adventurers, anything! But we're not murderers. We know nothing whatever about the murders of Noah and Salter Quick—except what we've read in the papers."

I believed him. And I made haste to say so—out of a sheer relief to know that Miss Raven was not among men whose hands were stained with blood.

"Thank you," he said, as coolly as ever. "I'm obliged to you. I've been anxious enough to know who did murder those two men. As I say, I felt no surprise when I heard of the murders."

"You knew them—the Quicks?" I suggested.

"Did I?" he answered, with a cynical laugh. "Didn't I? They were a couple of rank bad 'uns! I have never professed sanctity, Mr. Middlebrook, but Noah and Salter Quick were of a brand that's far beyond me—they were bad men. I'll tell you more of 'em later— Here's Miss Raven."

"I may as well tell you," I murmured hastily, "that Miss Raven knows as much as I do about all that I've just told you."

"That so?" he said. "Um. And she looks a sensible sort of lass, too. Well, I'll tell you both what I know—as I say, later. But now—some tea."

While he went forward to give his orders, I contrived to inform Miss Raven of the gist of our recent conversation, and to assert my own private belief in Baxter's innocence. I saw that she was already prejudiced in his favor.

"I'm glad to know that," she said. "But, in that case, the mystery's all the deeper. What is it, I wonder, that he can tell."

"Wait till he speaks," said I. "We shall learn something."

BAXTER came back presently, followed by the Chinaman whom I had seen before, who deftly set up a small table on deck, drew chairs round it, and a few minutes later spread out all the necessaries of a dainty afternoon tea. And in the center of them was a plum cake. I saw Miss Raven glance at it; I glanced at her; I knew of what she was thinking. Her thoughts had flown to the plum cake at Lorrimore's, made by Wing, his Chinese servant.

But whatever we thought, we said nothing. The situation was romantic, and not without some attraction, even in those curious circumstances. Here we were, prisoners, first-class prisoners, if you will, but still prisoners, and there was our jailer; he and ourselves sat round a tea-table, munching toast, nibbling cakes and dainties, sipping fragrant tea, as if we had been in any lady's drawing-room. I think it speaks well for all of us that we realized the situation and made the most of it by affecting to ignore the actual reality. We chatted, as well-behaved people should under similar conditions, about anything but the prime fact of our imprisonment; Baxter, indeed, might have been our very polite and attentive host and we his willing guests. As for Miss Raven, she accepted the whole thing with hearty good humor and poured out the tea as if she had been familiar with our new quarters for many a long day; moreover, she adopted a friendly attitude toward our captors, which did much toward smoothing any present difficulties.

"You seem to be very well accommodated in the matter of servants, Mr. Baxter," she observed. "That little Chinaman, as you said, is as good as a French maid, and you certainly have a good cook—excellent pastry-cook, anyway."

Baxter glanced lazily in the direction of the galley.

"Another Chinaman," he answered. He looked significantly at me. "Mr. Middlebrook," he continued, "is aware that I bought this yawl from a ship-broker in Hull for a special purpose——"

"Not aware of the special purpose," I interrupted, with a purposely sly glance at him.

"The special purpose is a run across the Atlantic, if you want to know," he answered carelessly. "Of course, when I'd got her, I wanted a small crew. Now, I've had great experience with Chinamen—best servants on earth, in my opinion—so I sailed her down to the Thames, went up to London Docks and took on some Chinese chaps that I got in Limehouse. Two men and one cook—man cook, of course. He's good—I can't promise you a real and proper dinner to-night, but I can promise a very satisfactory substitute, which we call supper."

"And you're going across the Atlantic with a crew of three?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact," he answered candidly, "there are six of us. The three Chinese, myself, my friend who was with me this afternoon, and who will join us again to-morrow, and another friend who will return with him, and who, like the crew, is a Chinaman. But he's a Chinaman of rank, position."

"In other words, the Chinese gentleman who was with you and your French friend in Hull?" I suggested.

"Just so—since we're to be frank," he answered. "The same." Then, with a laugh, he glanced at Miss Raven. "Mr. Middlebrook," he said, "considers me the most candid desperado he ever met."

"Your candor is certainly interesting," replied Miss Raven. "Especially if you really are a desperado. Perhaps you'll give us more of it?"

"I'll tell you a bit—later on," he said. "That Quick business, I mean."

Suddenly setting down his teacup, he got up and moved away toward the galley, into which he presently disappeared. Miss Raven turned sharply on me.

"Did you eat a slice of that plum cake?" she whispered. "You did?"

"I know what you're thinking," I answered. "It reminds you of the cake that Lorrimore's man, Wing, makes."

"Reminds!" she exclaimed. "There's no reminding about it! Do you know what I think? That man, Wing, is aboard this yacht. He made that cake!"

The surprising adventures of the kidnaped pair and the clearing-up of this deep mystery are related in the concluding instalment of "Ravensdene court"—see March EVERYBODY's, out February 15th.

Her Family

Sometimes We Hate Our Relations Bad Enough to Think About Substituting the Soviet System, but Before You Make Up Your Mind Definitely, Read This Story by the Author of "The Winning Sister"

By Helen Redington

Illustrations by Mead Schaeffer

"FAMILIES," said Priscilla Wingate, "serve no purpose whatsoever. I'm all for the soviet system myself." The tone she succeeded in making light, but there was a catch in her throat that she could not quite handle.

Jane looked up from the bacon she was frying on their one-burner gas-stove.

"What," she asked, "are your aristocratic Wingate connections up to now?"

Priscilla crumpled the heavy white linen of her letter into a ball and pitched it into the waste-basket.

"Stopped my dinky allowance!" The fire of her red hair was in her voice. "They see no reason why, if I feel that I must write, I can't do it as well at home. They don't like the idea of my living so primitively."

"Come eat," said Jane.

"I suppose," Priscilla continued, as she obediently drew up the rocking-chair, built table-high with pillows, and began to butter the toast, "I suppose they think I can snatch a moment to do a sonnet between afternoon tea and time to dress for dinner. It's the only leisure I ever met in that house full of aunts and uncles and social engagements!"

"Poetry doesn't pay its way." Jane was thoughtful.

"I know it." Priscilla's voice hinted tears. "Just the same, I'm going to find a way to make my own living. I will not be a butterfly."

But it was not until Jane had departed to take her place in the line of daily wage-earners filing past the subway ticket-chopper that Priscilla's inspiration came. Her immediate scanning of the want-ad column offered little. The only thing she could do for which people paid money was typing, and she doubted her success as an office-girl. But one tiny insert appealed to her imagination. If she was to abandon verse-making for money-making, she did want a situation with a kick in it. And this hinted at mystery:

SECRETARY—One who can endure existence apart from Broadway, with topics of conversation other than her employer's affairs.

An employer with a sense of humor and an occupation which must not be talked about! The idea appealed to Priscilla.

She began to dress for the street with unusual care. Clothes, she had long since learned, opened many a door otherwise closed. And it was such a door that she meant to attack. Her suit, a gift from one of the fond aunts whose name was now anathema, was of the seal-brown that Priscilla insisted on believing made her hair less glowingly red. The soft green felt of early fall, her latest extravagance, was chosen for its effect on her eyes. "I loathe blue-eyed, pink-cheeked baby women!" was her verdict on herself. Nevertheless, she did not fail to estimate masculine leanings to the type at their proper worth.

"You make capital of your looks," Jane had once accused. "It's not honest."

"It's all I can make capital of," Priscilla had answered gaily. But she knew that Jane was right. And many a time had she sighed over the fact that her aunts were not uncles. Nevertheless, honest or otherwise, for this particular adventure she marshaled her forces. For she was deliberately going forth to vamp the news-ad man.

And she did. At her violet-eyed insistence, he succeeded in getting the man in need of a discreet secretary on the other end of a long-distance wire.

"Tell him," ordered Priscilla, "to meet the six-ten train. I'll be on it. Now *hang up!* There!" She smiled upon the pulplike clerk. "That's fixed, and I'm awfully grateful to you."

And she did not remember until she was two blocks away that she had not paid for the call. "Can't risk going back," she decided. "That man probably called up and told them to stop me." So she sent the money by messenger, ruefully taking stock of what was left of her capital. The hat had cost such a lot. "It will get me there," she estimated, "but not back. I'll *have* to stay."

SHE left a note for Jane, the ad pinned to it in explanation. And, with her suitcase crammed to bursting, Jane's best umbrella hanging to her wrist (she had to provide protection for the new hat), she departed, self-appointed private and confidential secretary to Russell Conroy, of West Conroy, Pennsylvania.

"If he doesn't meet me, if he doesn't meet me," clicked the wheels of the six-ten local. "If he won't have me, if he won't have me," was the echo. "He won't know you, he won't know you," creaked the brakes as the train jerked to a stop.

But there was no question as to that. For Priscilla, her suitcase so heavy that its transportation occupied her entire attention, was the sole passenger to alight at West Conroy. And the only person awaiting the train was a slender young man, quite obviously nervous at the sight of her.

"You're not Miss Wingate?" His eyes lighted hopefully behind the round tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles.

"I am."

Here was the next bearer of the suitcase. Priscilla dumped it at his feet.

"You're much too young." His eyes begged her to believe in the finality of his tone.

Priscilla remembered her empty purse and refused to be daunted.

"I am not, really," she assured him. "I'm quite old. It's my color-scheme that deceives you."

"Your coming is so very sudden." He yielded his first point helplessly. "I haven't had time to adjust. I had intended—it is almost necessary—that my secretary live at my house. I've a very excellent housekeeper. But you—" And he blushed deeply.

"How perfectly lovely!" Priscilla's enthusiasm was genuine. She had hated boarding-houses since her freshman college-days.

"You're so young!" His tone was beseeching her to understand his difficulties. But she would not—not with that excellent housekeeper to anchor to.

"I'm very hungry," she suggested.

That settled it. Men are but men—and helpless. He lifted the solid-iron suitcase with an ease his build had not led her to expect, and strode to the runabout behind the station.

"Luck—luck!" she chanted. "In pure luck!"

And it was in this strain that she wrote to Jane the next day:

> A ducky house—one of these nice old things that have been handed down from father to son, each father and each son building an addition in his own tasteful way. It rambles all over the lot, which is large and also rambles. It has an orchard and a grape-arbor, a poor neglected flower garden and a cow. And, oh, Janie, the housekeeper! She's been handed down, too. And nothing short of a fictional Scotch ancestor ever got by her. But when she called after me this morning to know if I'd my rubbers on, I knew I'd won.

But the letter said no word of the confidential business, for the very excellent reason that Priscilla had not yet met her job face to face.

Her host—she could in no sense call him her employer—breakfasted with her, dined with her. He made shy conversation and escaped promptly. That he was head professor of mathematics in the town's cherished institution, Conroy University, she learned from Mrs. Robertson, the housekeeper.

"He's so young!" Priscilla had objected, even as he. Mathematics!

And after dinner on the evening of the second day of her presence in Professor

Conroy's house, she did not allow that slender figure to bow itself swiftly away into its study. She followed, despite the entreaty behind the round glasses, and sank into a deep-upholstered chair.

"This is a nice room," she said.

It was. Book-lined, quiet, well ordered—the room of a scholar. Restful, ease-giving, the room of a man at peace with himself.

PRISCILLA looked at the young man with deepening appreciation.

"There's no reason, Doctor Conroy," she told him simply, "why a man like you should be afraid of a girl like me."

Perhaps the catch in her throat on the last words loosened his tongue. Perhaps the sudden break in her self-assurance restored his. At any rate, his reply was prompt.

"A man like me," he said, with the sudden smile she had already begun to watch for, "is always afraid when a young woman is as lovely as you, Miss Wingate."

Priscilla had needed just that. Compliments she knew how to handle.

"Thanks!" she said. "Your room overawed me. Of course, what I have come in here to say is"—she glanced wistfully at him—"that I understand at last the complete effrontery with which I have forced myself upon you. I can't possibly be secretary to a department of mathematics. I'll go—to-morrow." Her hesitancy on the last word was really due to her sudden remembrance of the empty purse. But how could Russell Conroy know that?

"Where?" he asked succinctly.

"Home. To my family." Priscilla felt suddenly beaten. It was the mathematics, she decided, that had done it. She would have to telegraph for money.

"Family?" His tone was wistful. "That sounds attractive. I haven't any, you know." Again that utterly ingratiating smile.

"You're lucky." Priscilla was vicious. She might yield to the inevitable; she refused to be felicitated on her yielding.

"Yes?"

No one could have resisted the sympathetic receptivity of the question. And she had not, for three days, had an opportunity to air her grievance.

"Families," she began, sinking deeper into the wide-armed chair, "are all very well in their place. But they never know their place." She paused, contemplative eyes on the man. "You'd not understand," she decided. "You're not the sort of man to go about roaring like a lion."

"I've been roared at," he offered, in comradely fashion.

"You have?" She sat forward in eager interest. "Then you know that families always know what is best for you, and never question their own wisdom?"

"I know," he admitted.

"And they're always wrong," finished Priscilla. "I know they are."

"How wonderful—to know anything!" he laughed. The girl flushed.

"Now you're thinking me as arrogant as my family. But a person does know about himself, doesn't he?" She was begging him to deal gently with her assurance.

"Of course," he agreed. "Yet you say you're going back to them. I'd have thought you had more courage."

Priscilla's eyes darkened.

"Thank you." She looked at him half smilingly. "I needed some one to say just that to me. You've no idea how hard it gets—to fight always. Especially when you know they mean——"

"Oh, mean!" He swept that aside. "What do they want you to do?"

"Stay at home and be a vegetable."

Her scorn made him smile.

"And what do you want to do?"

"Write—" She hesitated. How would the next sound to a professor of mathematics? "Poetry," she finished defiantly.

"Write poetry." He nodded approval. "That's better. Well, why don't you?"

"Oh, I do! But nobody buys it, at least not enough of it. And the family say I can write just as well at home—how can I when there's not one uninterrupted minute?—and they stopped my allowance."

"So that's why you were so determined to be my secretary." He laughed again. "Are none of your relatives masculine?"

Priscilla smiled.

"Yes. But the aunts see them oftener than I do. And they always see them last."

And they laughed together.

"So now you've decided that even they are preferable to my quiet house?" There was raillery in the question.

"No! Oh, no! I love your house—and Mrs. Robertson and——"

"Don't stop," he suggested, and blushed deliciously.

"It's the mathematics," Priscilla wailed. "I can't be secretary to that!"

"My dear young lady"— the young man became quite suddenly Professor Conroy, older, more competent, and master of the situation—"if I had wanted an adding machine, I should have so specified in my advertisement. Your only drawback for the work I have in mind is your extreme youth and—gorgeousness. I don't know"—plaintively—"whether I could work in the same room with you or not. I never"—and here he seemed to surrender quite helplessly to an unruly tongue—"saw such hair! I can't be with you and think of anything else."

"It's shameful, I know," admitted Priscilla composedly. "But you'd get used to it. I had to. There's one thing more, though." This was atrocious, and she knew it. "I don't know shorthand."

They smiled at each other, he in perplexity, she in apology.

"You see, I type so rapidly I thought you might let me take your work directly on the machine."

"Oh, but that's splendid!" Again, momentarily, he seemed free from his awe of her. "I'm so afraid of those funny little marks stenographers put down I can't keep my mind on what I'm saying."

Priscilla settled back with a sigh.

"Then I'm to stay?"

"You are the one who was talking of leaving," he reminded her. "I didn't want you to go," he added brazenly.

"And when do we get to work?"

"Oh, that!" He hesitated. "In a day or two—perhaps."

Priscilla sighed.

"There's still something wrong about me."

"Not you. Me." He moved uncomfortably, his chair creaking with his shift of weight. Methodically he got up, examined it, went to his closet for a bottle of oil and carefully removed the squeak from the chair, wiped his hands and sat down again with a little sigh.

"All fake," he admitted. "Just putting off telling you. In fact, if you hadn't come at me in just the way you did, I'd never have had the nerve to follow up that ad. It's my secret." The boyish smile did not disguise to Priscilla that this was serious. "Yours is poetry—" He paused. "Well, mine's"— drawing a deep breath— "playwriting." Priscilla's eyebrows lifted in interested questioning. "But always," he explained, "we Conroys have taught in our university. My great-grandfather founded it; the town's named for us, too, you know. Family pressure. And I hadn't your courage. So here I am. But look!"

Again he unlocked that closet door.

"Plays," he said, indicating shelf upon shelf of manuscripts. "I've been writing them since I was seven. And I never told anybody I was doing it."

He returned to his chair.

"It's sort of difficult, though. For one thing, I'm lazy. Don't like the work of setting them down. For another, I think on my feet, and I think aloud. It seemed to me if I could have some one to take it down as I talked it—only"— he eyed her doubtfully—"I thought it would have to be a nondescript sort of person, one I'd not notice or think about——"

"Try me," said Priscilla gently. "Perhaps some one like me—who likes what you're doing, I mean." She was dubious. Devotion like this made her modest.

"Do you know, I think it was the telling you I minded," he decided.

"What'll we tell people?" Priscilla yielded to the thrill of conspiracy. "Shall it be a book? On mathematics?"

"If you like." He seemed indifferent to that side of it.

PRISCILLA wrote Jane that very same evening:

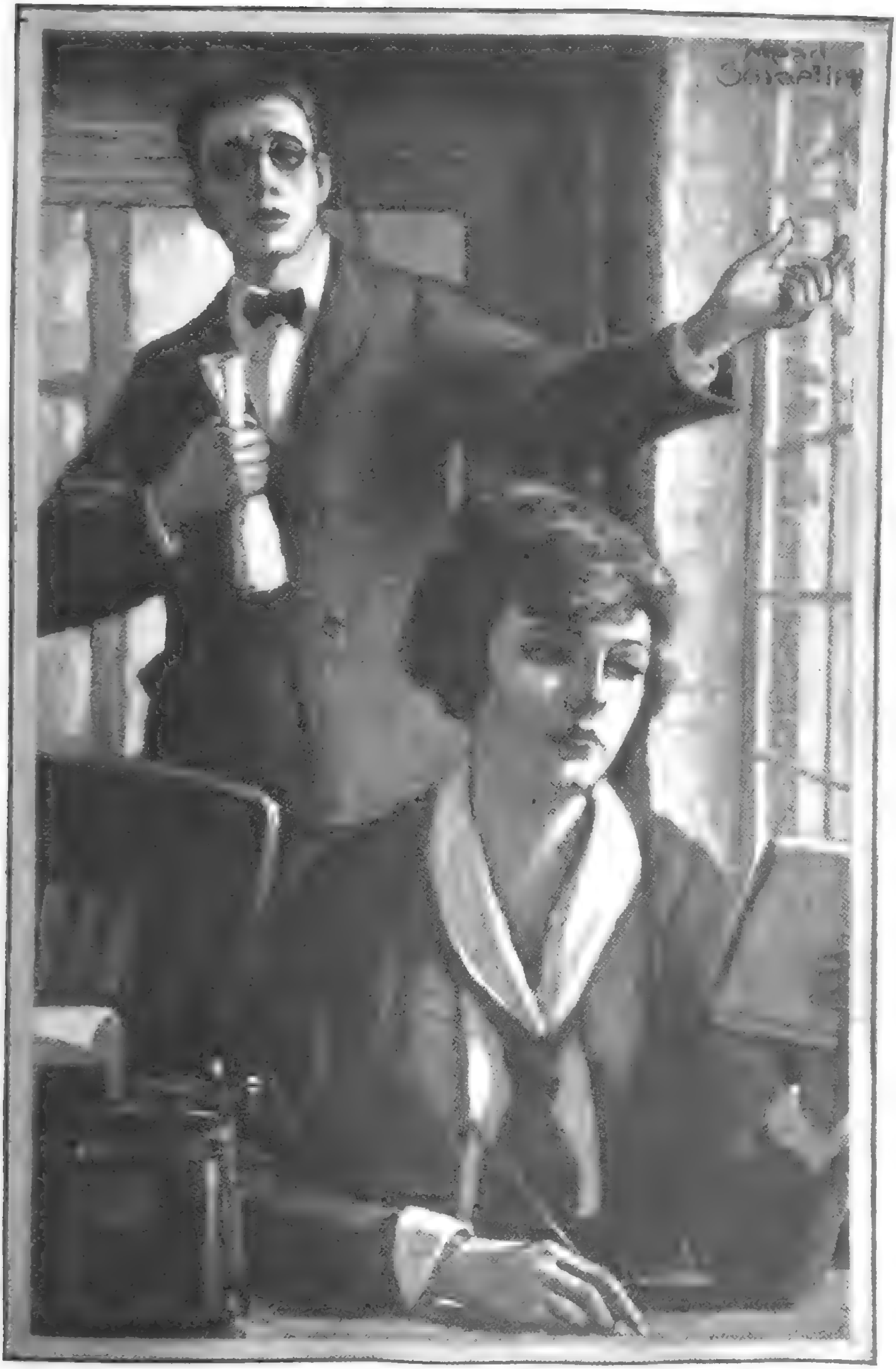
> He may be a small-town man, but he doesn't know small-town minds. He didn't want them to know what he was up to; and yet he hadn't thought that he might need to account for me. Men are such ostriches!

And then again, some weeks later:

> Do you know, I believe I'm going to get that poetry stuff of mine where it will stand alone. I've always my mornings to myself. In fact, I've more time than I wish I had—the town just stands off and looks at me. When I go to the post-office, they stop talking and stare. I tried church; my exit was like a dead-march—plenty of audience and only one performer.

This aloofness really troubled Priscilla.

"I like people," she explained to Mrs. Robertson. "And I require conversation. Who lives over there?" She indicated a neighbor's roof showing through the trees.



And the play growing under her hands was good. "High Noon," he called it.

"The Greenes." Tight lips closed on the clipped words. Priscilla sighed.

"As bad as that?" She was sitting on the porch steps, hands clasped about her knees.

"You'd not care about 'em." And Mrs. Robertson's broom attacked vigorously the dead leaves that had drifted into the corners of porch and steps.

"I might. I like lots of folks, Robbie." The stiff features bent into a smile.

"You do," she admitted, with her usual brevity. "You like me! Hah!"

That final monosyllable startled Priscilla; she didn't know the response. Was it a laugh or an exclamation of contempt? She hastened into talk.

"There's Mr. Greene," she enumerated. "I've seen him leaving the house in the morning. He's red and round and prosperous, eats too much, spends too much, and thinks he makes the wheels go round. He gets his breakfast at seven-thirty and stands on his porch steps lighting his fat cigar as the town clock strikes eight."

"That's him," admitted the woman.

"And there's Mrs. Greene. She's always just so, and speaks in the modulated tones of perfect breeding. If he sputters, she says, 'Yes, Silas,' and 'No, Silas,' in the martyred tone of one compelled by untoward circumstances to live with a boor. But she congratulates herself upon carrying it off with an air."

The housekeeper chuckled—a dry sound like the crackling of twigs.

"You're smart," she conceded.

"But the girl's pretty, Robbie."

"Isabel! Hah!" And the woman cleared the walk of its carpet of leaves with swift strokes of the gaunt arms. And again, as she entered the house, "Hah!"

Not to know the girl next door was, to Priscilla, an anomaly. Her appeal to the master of the house brought results.

"You're lonely. I'm sorry," he said contritely.

"Not lonely at all," Priscilla corrected. "Just curious."

AND at Russell Conroy's request, Isabel called.

"So glad to come, Miss Wingate," she murmured. "I really didn't know—I understood that you were Rus—Professor Conroy's secretary— Of course, when he asked me——"

And Priscilla, though her eyes laughed, agreed soberly to the difficulty of determining the social recognition due one in her anomalous position.

"We've wondered," Miss Greene insinuated into the conversation, "just why— There are really excellent typists in West Conroy."

Priscilla considered, eyed Miss Greene, and decided that it was safe to bluff.

"Perhaps," she lied cheerfully, "he could find no one with the necessary technical knowledge."

"Oh!" Isabel examined this new angle. "Do you really understand mathematics?"

"Who does?" evaded Priscilla.

And when, late that afternoon, Russell Conroy found her leafing through a textbook on infinitesimal calculus, she informed him quite seriously that she was acquiring a social vocabulary.

"Of course Professor Conroy and Isabel Greene have known each other always?" Priscilla tried to ask the question casually of the housekeeper next morning. Why, she demanded of herself, should she care whether they had or had not. And not caring, she blushed deeply to prove it.

"Grown up neighbors." Mrs. Robertson slammed the breakfast-dishes on the tray with unnecessary violence. "Didn't think so much of him till his uncle left him his money. Hah!"

So he was rich as well as alone. Some people, thought Priscilla, had all the luck.

"She'll marry him," Mrs. Robertson added unexpectedly, "if somebody doesn't save him." And the kitchen door, closing upon her with her loaded tray, gave emphasis to her words.

Priscilla sighed. Isabel, as mistress of Conroy House, would allow no more playwriting, of course.

It must have been that conviction that put the note of melancholy in her letters to Jane. Jane replied:

> You're not happy. Better come back. Are you just bored? Or is the young man making love to you?

Come back! How little Jane understood! Leave this lovely old house, Mrs. Robertson, the woods, the hills, the country roads for wandering? Of course she would have to when Isabel decreed it. Making love to her? Nothing, she knew, was farther from her employer's thoughts.

EVERY afternoon at three, Russell Conroy's eager step sounded on the front walk—eager to get to work, of course. He whistled to her as he opened the door to let her know he was ready. That was all there was to it.

He had a remarkable way of playing both critic and creator. In the evening he often worked alone, blue-penciling, inserting in his tiny script that was as plain as print. Those pages she retyped, so that in the afternoon they were ready to go forward. A swift running-over of these sheets and he was under way—wandering about the room, sharpening pencils already carefully pointed, rearranging books on the shelves, any mechanical thing preliminary to getting into the swing of his talk.

Priscilla had chosen for herself and her typewriter a corner out of the way of his wandering feet and eyes. But one day she found her desk and chair drawn up in front of one of the wide windows, and she knew that her presence no longer disturbed him.

And the play growing under her hands was good; Priscilla was sure of it. So mirth-provoking, so airily fantastic that she believed it bound for success. "High Noon," he called it.

"There's a moment," said *Geraldine*, his heroine, "of clear-seeing. When mine comes, I'll tell you my decision." And from the complications that grew out of these high moments for each of his characters, Russell Conroy built his play. Priscilla found it difficult to remain the passive transcriber under some of these built-up situations.

But one afternoon he came up the walk slowly. And in the study he seemed unable to get to work.

"Isabel says I'm keeping you too closely confined, working you too hard," he explained at length.

Priscilla's eyes widened and darkened as they always did with temper. Of course, since her coming, Isabel had found Russell Conroy inaccessible; hence this interference.

"I promised to bring you to dinner tomorrow night."

So she was to be used as bait before being eliminated!

Nevertheless, Priscilla was glad of the break. They had worked, always, up to the ringing of the dinner-gong. It was fun for a change to dress for dinner; and Jane had sent her trunk to her. The simple frock, black with the green she loved in the girdle, made her feel festive. And she ran down the stairs eagerly to join Conroy. There was a moment of misgiving when she found that he had not changed. Was he careless? Or had she made a mistake? It was too late now to inquire.

But her misgiving was quickly justified. Facing the raised eyebrows of Mrs. and and Miss Greene, she felt as conspicuous as if attired in a bathing-suit. And Mr. Greene's enthusiastic attentions did not ease the situation.

"Sly dog, Russell!" He winked at the young man and ogled the girl.

Nor did young Conroy himself make retribution less certain. Isabel's utmost failed of his attention. His eyes throughout the meal were only for Priscilla. She grew anxious under the dreaming fixity of his gaze and could ease the situation only by the giving of an exaggerated attention to Mr. Greene. Her place in West Conroy was slipping from her.

Mrs. Greene, at the head of her table, ignored all this. Yet Priscilla felt in her an enemy as implacable as the daughter.

"Is Russell Conroy the only eligible young man in this town?" the girl asked herself, in angry rebellion at her descending Nemesis. That their quiet days in the study were over she felt very sure.

The nature of the coming attack was hinted in Isabel Greene's parting dart.

"You mustn't mind father's staring, Miss Wingate," she had said sweetly. "We're very provincial in West Conroy. And you know you aren't just the sort of person we would have expected Professor Conroy's secretary to be. You must forgive us if we wonder why you came."

At home, Russell Conroy turned to her.

"I'm afraid Isabel meant that I had been rude, too. I'm sorry. I couldn't help staring. You're so——"

But if his "high noon" had come during that dinner-hour, Priscilla did not give him the opportunity to say so. She was eager to escape to her room before he should notice her distress. That was a kind of attack that she did not know how to meet.

Jane, she thought, might tell her. But Jane's answer to her S O S counseled flight. "He can get another secretary," she wrote; "you can't get another reputation. If there's a jealous-woman complication, get out."

AND when, early one afternoon, Silas Greene called upon her, she wished forlornly that she had taken Jane's advice. For Mr. Greene was one of the Board of Directors of Conroy University, and he came, he made plain, in a semiofficial capacity.

"It won't do, my dear young lady," he said, his small eyes with their puffy lids approving much too obviously of her youth and brilliance. "I admit the necessity, Professor Conroy's hours being as they are, of his secretary's presence under his roof. But to avoid, shall we say, misinterpretation of this sudden new devotion of his to the cause of literature, would it not have been well for him to choose one more obviously a secretary?"

"That," said Priscilla, "should be said to him, don't you think?"

"No doubt." He sat forward, lowering his voice in confidential intimacy. "But it occurred to me that you might prefer to have the matter attended to quietly."

Priscilla rose to her feet in dismissal.

"If you need assistance in securing another position—" hinted Mr. Greene, reluctantly following her hint.

"I am not considering another position, thank you."

Nevertheless, despite her bravado, it was a lonely and beaten Priscilla who crawled into the wide bed that night. She had felt tremendously brave in New York, shaping her life in the face of family disapproval. "I'll show them," had been her chant. And this was the result!

The hours of the next day dragged. No occupation could hold her. She knew, with a smile for her own forlornness, that the mood would pass. But for the moment all was dark. Three o'clock found her in the study, eager for Conroy's coming.

"What I need is work," she insisted.

"High Noon" was drawing rapidly to its conclusion. *Geraldine's* inspirational moment had come and led her into astounding difficulties; each character, accepting her doctrine, was merrily going to pieces under it. Why, wondered Priscilla, were life's complications funny on the stage? They came near to tragedy off it.

And suddenly she realized that the hour for Russell Conroy's home-coming was long past. She spent the hours till dinnertime disconsolately wandering about the house.

When the honk of a motor-horn drew her to the front door, she was surprised at her own relief. Just the sight of him standing there beside the car from which he had alighted somehow lightened her feeling of oppression. With a smile for her own weakness, she started down the walk to meet him. Then she realized that Isabel was at the wheel—Isabel, who, through her father, meant to drive this interloper away. And, this afternoon's adventure said quite plainly, if Priscilla would not go, Conroy could be kept from work. A secretary without occupation or reputation should prove an easy victim. Oppression settled once more upon Priscilla's spirits. The girl against whom she was pitted was cleverer than she had at first believed. And her own chief weapon was one which the rules of the game forbade her using. She was not, no matter how beset, going to play the rôle of adventuress seeking to "vamp" her wealthy employer.

Conroy had seen her now, and was coming toward her. Mechanically she smiled and bowed to the girl at the wheel. And then her eyes widened. For Isabel's eyes had slid over her and she had driven off without apparently seeing her. Was West Conroy really going to cut her openly? Priscilla Wingate, spoiled, independent, tremendously adequate—was it possible that a small Pennsylvania town could reduce her to do this? She had never before realized how easily a human being could be put on the defensive.

"I'm sorry about this afternoon." Conroy's eyes were bright; they seemed to touch her caressingly. But this did not bring any relief; it was not his opinion of her that counted in this crisis. "Isabel was at the college with her father and offered to bring me home. And then——"

But Priscilla was not listening. What difference did it make, the device by which she had kept him with her? Any girl could do it with a man like Russell Conroy. His courtesy robbed him of defensive weapons.

The play was doomed; so was she; so, for that matter, was he.

ONLY stubbornness kept Priscilla from flight. The play-writing, as she had foreseen, was broken into on one pretext and another until her services to Conroy were nominal. She was growing more and more sensitive about the treatment accorded her by the townspeople. She felt a whispering pursue her, precede her, wrap her about in its miasma. Mr. Greene's unctuous greetings were, she knew, more gossip-feeding than even his daughter's pointed ignoring of her. "If you don't leave that place," Jane stormed, "I'll do something to make you."

What that something was developed one early sunshiny afternoon. Priscilla was on the front steps, a heavy sweater about her shoulders, for the bite of late fall was in the air. In an abandonment to self-pity, she was trying to decide upon her course. And then, suddenly, she saw coming up the walk—her uncle! Safety, protection, background—she was no longer alone. To her rescue had come *her family!* In a moment she was in his arms, shedding luxurious tears all over his coat collar. And he was holding her close, patting her—almost, she realized, crying with her.

"Child! Child!" she heard him murmur. "Why don't you come home?"

And Priscilla burst forth into fresh weeping. Home, her own people, her friends who understood her, who never questioned or doubted her! Why didn't she go home?

And then, quite suddenly, the storm ended. She mopped away all traces of the deluge and settled herself comfortably beside her uncle on the porch-swing.

"What brought you?" she demanded.

"Jane sent for me. Priscilla"— sternness, affection, despair were in the eyes fixed on her—"why did you do anything so infernally idiotic? Didn't you know——"

The light of battle shone in Priscilla's tear-washed eyes.

"It wasn't idiotic. It was extremely sensible. Besides, you drove me to it."

"If that's the way you feel—" Angrily he felt for his watch.

"Oh, don't do that!" Panic possessed her at the thought of his leaving her. "You must stay overnight at least."

"I came to take you home. Are you coming?"

This sounded uncompromising. In the first wild moments of his arrival, *home* was Priscilla's one objective. But now that bird which was Priscilla's heart had soared to the very top of its tower-chamber and was peeping through the window to see what it might see; and that lightning vision which was Priscilla's brain saw the capital it could make of this presentable and much needed relative. So Jane thought she must run away from this small-town scandal? She would show her. She would kill it overnight. And her uncle would hold up her hands.

"Of course I can't go without packing," she evaded. "And we ought at least to inform my employer, don't you think?"

"Young ass! No!"

But when Russell Conroy arrived, the two men looked each other over and shook hands cordially.

"You're staying with us, sir," said the young man, and the two of them departed to the hotel for Mr. Wingate's bag.

"Don't you think we could ask the Greenes to dinner to meet uncle?" Priscilla had suggested, and Conroy, eager as always to meet an expressed wish of hers, agreed.

"You stop and ask them," she instructed. "Insist!" she added. For how could she kill scandal without an audience?

Then she went to break the news to Mrs. Robertson. Four guests for dinner, invited by Professor Conroy's secretary at four o'clock in the afternoon! She laughed to herself at the situation; but she knew Mrs. Robertson.

The woman listened throughout the explanation, and commented only with that explosive "Hah!" which still left Priscilla somehow disconcerted. She lacked the proper rejoinder. "I told you you'd have to fight," added the housekeeper.

And then Priscilla went joyfully to, as her uncle expressed it, put on her war-paint. The two men, she decided, could look after themselves. The more her uncle saw of her guileless employer the better would he understand her action. For, quite suddenly, Priscilla had decided to stay with her job. Driven by the cruelty of her family to self-support, what else could she do?

Clearly, the girl was her own independent, impudent self again.

And if she had been thoughtless in her selection of attire for her first West Conroy dinner-party, she did not make that mistake a second time. And she smiled wickedly upon the result in the mirror. For this simple afternoon frock, another gift from another outraged aunt, was far more costly than had been the offensive dinner gown. In its selection Priscilla had for once admitted that her eyes were blue. Its soft gray chiffon fell straight over a frankly blue silk drop, and the girdle was knotted with blue. "But it's perfectly modest," mocked Priscilla, "for it does cover my arms—part of them, that is." She had always felt most completely herself in this dress, surest of her effects. So attired, her evening was in her own hands.

Yet, socially, her dinner could not have been judged a success. For nobody had a good time. Nobody, that is, but Mr. Greene. George Wingate was George Wingate; to sit at the same table with him was an opportunity. The small-town plutocrat did homage to the big-town plutocrat—and unctuously. He beamed, he flattered, he radiated tolerance, did Silas Greene. Priscilla's excursion into the realm of self-support became no more than a clever young girl's freak. For, with just the right humorous effect, she had told of her ambition, of the family attitude, of its effort at coercion, of her own rebellion. She told of Professor Conroy's dismayed reception of her, and the pecuniary reason back of her own insistence.

"You didn't tell me that," indignantly interrupted Russell Conroy.

Backed by the presence of this irate, highly respectable uncle, the story sounded not only amusing but true—an escapade, to be sure, but venial. So much, she told herself scornfully, of power and potency had capitalistic front. She turned impulsively to Isabel. After all, the girl had only used the weapons she had at hand—what was Priscilla herself now doing but just that?

"It's nice, anyway, to have a girl next door to be friends with."

But Isabel's eyes met hers with suspicion flaming in them. For who could understand this Priscilla? When happy, all her grievances with their causes were swept clean from her mind.

No; the dinner was not a social success. The departure of the guests was an obvious relief to them as well as to their hosts.

And if, by the mere weight of her uncle's presence, she had succeeded in establishing herself as respectable in West Conroy, Priscilla had won neither her uncle's nor young Conroy's consent to her remaining until the completion of "High Noon."

"I've acted like a fool," said Russell Conroy. "I ought to have known the town would gossip."

Evidently, in their hours together, her uncle had explained the reason for his coming.

"So I'm to go home with Uncle George to-morrow. You two have quite settled it?" There was both mischief and malice in her eyes. She did not purpose being disposed of by two mere men. She would leave at her own discretion, and she would not be personally conducted. "Then I'd better go pack. Good-night."

But she did not pack. At breakfast, as if it was the first time the subject had been mentioned, she told her uncle that she would probably be home within two weeks, that it looked as if their work would be finished within that time.

"I'll get the devil if I don't bring you back with me," said George Wingate, in helpless rage.

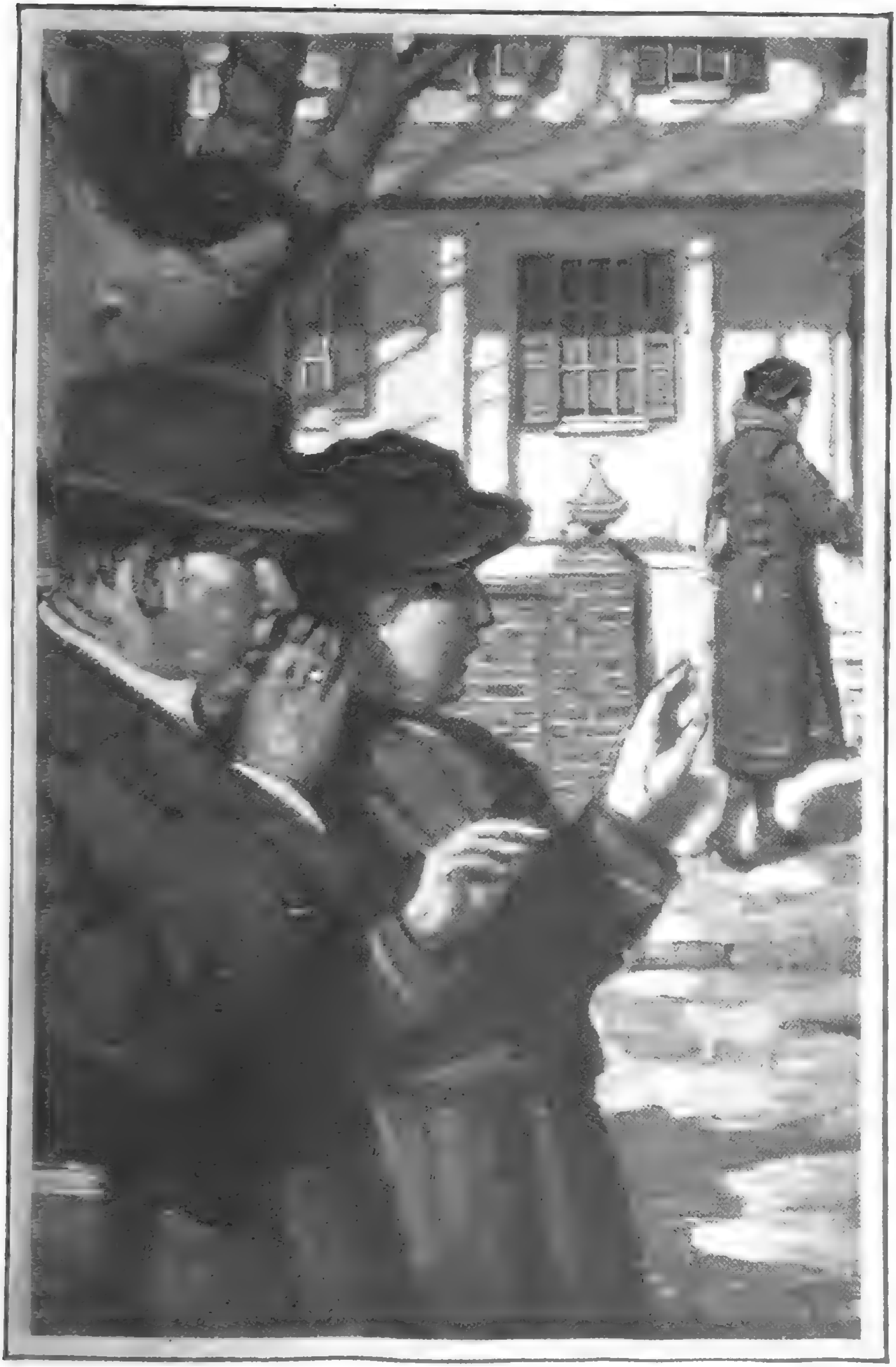
"Yes, dear." She kissed him tenderly. "I've been getting it from all of you all my life. Can't you stand it this once?"

To Conroy, she spoke not at all. And the two men shook hands in parting in sympathetic understanding, the one of the other.

"Her aunts are just like her," said George Wingate. "And I've got to face three of them."

IF RUSSELL CONROY had supposed that the resumption of play-making would be difficult, he did not know Priscilla. Somehow, when he entered his quiet study that afternoon, she had succeeded in wiping the slate clean. Isabel Greene with her jealousy, Silas Greene with his threat, her Uncle George's eruption were as if they had never been. Conroy House had slipped back into the quiet serenity of its former days. The work went swiftly to its conclusion.

In the joyful days that followed, Priscilla watched a tiny, permanent smile etch



Priscilla was growing more and more sensitive about the treatment accorded her by the townspeople. She felt a whispering pursue her.

itself upon Mrs. Robertson's stiff features. She even managed to coax Isabel to a semblance of friendliness.

"Let her be," admonished the housekeeper.

"I can't, Robbie," Priscilla confessed. "Life's so nice. I simply can't not be friends with people."

"Hah!" ejaculated the woman.

And when the last line of the last page of "High Noon" was typed, when five complete copies were neatly bound, when even the letters asking for a reading of the manuscript had been sent to the producers, Priscilla smiled mistily upon her employer.

"Now I'll go home," she said.

"Yes," he agreed. And Priscilla noticed that he was refusing to look at her. And she smiled to herself.

"Shall I get you another secretary in New York?" she asked. "One discreet—and gossip-proof?"

"I shall never have another secretary."

"Have I been such a failure?" The wistful tone was pure affectation.

"You've written the whole play!"—vehemently. "I've thrown out and stuck in lines just to suit you."

"Why—I never said a word!"

"You didn't need to. It was 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' with the corners of your mouth. I wrote by them. That's why I moved you out into the light, where I could see you." Then he asked diffidently, "Is it good, do you think?"

"If I hadn't thought so," she said, "would I have stayed?"

He was standing over her now, looking down on her as he had so often stood in those days of his writing. Only, then he had seemed not to see her; now he seemed to see nothing else.

"Yes," he decided; "you would have stayed, anyway. You're a splendid sporting proposition. And you'd not go back on a job half done. But how"—and his boyishness took all the coquette out of Priscilla—"how am I going to make you stay now?"

Priscilla was ready; she had planned exactly what she would say to this man who had so easily taken sides with her uncle against her. But in the face of his simplicity the words would not come.

"I don't expect it." He was talking about her, rather than to her. He was looking at her still with that impersonal appraisal. "A woman so full of color, of life, of beauty doesn't belong in my life. No. It's just that beautiful loyalty of yours that made you stick. I couldn't hope to keep you."

"Oh, my dear, you could!" Priscilla rose to face him. His modesty, in the face of her own mere surface-qualities, hurt. Her hands slid into his, and the tears in her eyes could not dim her tenderness.

"IT'S luck saved you," Mrs. Robertson commented, when Russell Conroy told her his glad news. And neither she nor Priscilla explained to his puzzled incomprehension what luck had saved him from.

"There's just one thing that stands in the way," Priscilla admitted, as, again manfully bearing her suitcase, he stood with her on the station platform awaiting the train that was to carry her home. They had agreed that her wedding preparations should be brief. "Just one thing that keeps me from being entirely happy."

Quick consternation crept into his eyes.

"The family is going to be so pleased."

He didn't quite get that.

"They'll say how fortunate it is that I've a man to take care of me. I did want them to admit that I could take care of myself."

"I see."

And Priscilla, in amazed tenderness, saw that he was taking her seriously. Despite his humor, so evident in his manuscript, he seemed to find even her whims matter for absorbed attention.

"I know." He turned inspiration-lit eyes upon her. "We'll do a musical comedy next, and you can write the lyrics. The money will be of your own earning, and the poetry will have paid its way. Would that do?"

"It would," agreed Priscilla fervently.

"Families," Priscilla Wingate wrote Jane in the jiggling scrawl of train-penmanship, "do sometimes serve other purposes than discipline. I think I won't abolish mine—yet."

The Uneven Battle Between Destroyer and Conserver

FORAKER'S FOLLY

A Red-Blooded Novel of To-day

A New Danger Threatens Helen's Cherished Project, and John Taylor Finds the Struggle Going Against Him

By Harold Titus

Illustrations by R. K. Ryland

WHEN John Taylor wrote his father of the wonderful discovery he had made in the wilds of northern Michigan, the old man was more than skeptical. In a curt reply he told his son that he was crazy and that his confidential man, Philip Rowe, was coming to Pancake at once to find out how big a fool he was.

Nevertheless, John's report was true. He had accidentally stumbled upon a tract of several thousand acres of white pine almost ready for market. This was Foraker's Folly—as the people of the country called it—the slowly ripening fruit of an idea born fifty years ago when a man named Foraker realized the inevitable result of the ruthless felling of the pine, studied reforestration and made practical application of a project which aimed at so growing the trees that, the long waiting period once over, there would always be lumber to cut.

Long since dead, his daughter Helen had made every sacrifice, casting aside, even, all thoughts of love and marriage, in order to keep the work going. Not that she was lacking in suitors. There was Milt Goddard, her foreman, and Sim Burns, a local politician, who, under the influence of Jim Harris, an unscrupulous land promoter, had threatened a crushing increase of the lumber tax if she would not become his wife.

But Helen would listen to neither. Burdened with constantly increasing debt, anxiously awaiting the near-approaching moment when the first of her father's plantings would be ready for the cutter's ax, her life was spent almost in seclusion with her household, which consisted of a faithful woodsman, Black Joe, who was on bad terms with his wife, Aunty May. The pair looked after two children, Benny and Bessy, by arrangement with their legal guardian, Humphrey Bryant, who wanted to remove his charges from the influence of their only living relative—a dissipated youth.

John Taylor's letter to his father was born of a desire to help Helen in her difficulties. He had come across Foraker's Folly while seeking a large quantity of hardwood logs his father had given him as his start in life. These lay in a tangled mass some thirteen miles from the nearest railway, and the prospect of handling them with profit seemed almost hopeless. The young man, deeply discouraged, was for abandoning his property, but Helen showed how they could be floated to a mill and sawed. From deep gratitude and wondering admiration his feelings had ripened into love, and he lived on in the men's shanty at the Folly, his thoughts on how best to serve the brave girl fighting against such tremendous odds.

Luke Taylor had grown rich as a lumberman, but he had cut the trees until his lands were now quite bare. In consequence, the zest of life had left him, and he sat in his Detroit home, his occupation gone, dreaming of the vanished pine. What would he do when he learned of the existence of Foraker's Folly? John hoped for financial aid, but the lust of possession was still strong in old Luke. Besides, he had a poor opinion of his son's ability, a judgment not disturbed but strengthened by the crafty Philip Rowe, who was not only doing all he could to keep a breach between father and son but was a rival in love.

For John had started on his venture leaving Marcia Murray behind, and he felt uneasy about Rowe, although the girl had promised to become John's wife. But for him, Marcia was now a finished chapter in his life; he had met Helen, and there was no place in his heart for any one else.

Marcia, a cold and calculating creature, had no idea of relinquishing the Taylor millions, and when John failed to keep the promise of a Sunday visit to a house where she was staying only forty miles from where he was, she, at the instigation of her resourceful friend, Fan Huston, took her car and drove over to Foraker's Folly to see what was the matter.

It did not take her long to find out. John told her frankly that he could not make her happy, also of his interest in Foraker's Folly and of the hope that his father would save it from creditors and tax collectors. Her insincere pleadings and protestations had no effect upon him. He did not bring Helen into the affair, but when Marcia met her, she need not have been told. Her manner was rudeness itself, and she took herself off with a parting shot: "I am going, to make room for you, Miss Foraker."

THE anger which had been in Marcia's face died long before she crossed Seven-Mile Creek. She became a trifle pale, a little drawn of feature, as though she had been through an ordeal, as if she had bid high on a long chance and lost. But her eyes, though fast on the road, showed a degree of speculation that does not often come to the blue eyes of a golden-haired girl; they were not hopeless or dismayed. And when she reached the place where she had been stalled, she did not turn into the road that would take her back to Windigo Lodge, but kept right on to Pancake, stopped her car at the Commercial House, where she registered and was given a room, and from there she telephoned Mrs. Mason.

"This is Marcia," she said gaily. "John won't let me come back to-night, so I'm going to stay over . . . Yes; he's awfully busy . . . I'm with Miss Foraker. . . . Delightful— See you all to-morrow."

She hung up the receiver and stepped out of the booth, her mouth set.

"What time is the train from the south due?" she asked Henry.

"Nine-ten," he replied.

"That is the only one to-day?"

"Only one since noon."

A full moon hung over Pancake as the night train slid to a stop, glorifying the ugly little town.

Philip Rowe came across the street beside Henry, who had gone to the train to guide stray travelers to his shelter, and Marcia, from the hotel veranda, watched him come, rocking gently in a rickety chair.

She remained there while he registered and went to his room, waiting patiently because the rooms were stuffy and she knew he would not stay inside.

Soon he came out the door and stopped to light a cigar. She could see his frown in the flare of the match; she saw, too, the look of amazement when she spoke.

He came toward her with quick steps and leaned over her chair.

"Marcia Murray!"

"Why so dramatic?" she laughed, as she let her hand rest in his.

"Of all places to find you!"

"You knew I was at Dick Mason's."

"But that's a long ways from here!"

"Love," she said mockingly, "laughs at locksmiths and bad roads."

His hand tightened on hers until she winced.

"Oh, not that, Phil! You're so eager and impulsive—and such an optimist! I had no idea that you were coming, though I believe John did mention it."

He dropped her hand and leaned against the railing.

"You came over here to see him?"

Her clear laugh came again.

"Of course! Who else would I come to see? Though naturally I'm glad that you are here to-night. I had planned a lonely evening. John doesn't know that I got off the road and missed my way until late. I was with him all day, and he thinks I'm safe at Windigo. It would only worry him if I let him know. Phil, he's quite changed."

"I expect so"—dryly.

Pause.

"Why don't we walk?" Rowe asked. "I've ridden all——"

"Fine! Such a night!"

THEY went together out along the board sidewalk to where it became but two planks laid side by side in the sand, and finally off that into the road itself.

"Don't you think John is doing wonderfully?" Marcia asked.

Rowe shrugged.

"He's doing something, yes; but the old man can't trust him. He's a kid in business, been lucky; but he has a deal on, and Luke won't trust him to go it alone. That is why I'm here."

Marcia lowered her face, and he would have been startled had he seen its intentness.

"Then he hasn't overcome his father's prejudice?"

"No!"—explosively.

"But if he should show big things?"

"He has to do that yet."

"Don't you think this new idealism he's developing will appeal to his father?"

Rowe glanced sideways at her.

"Just what do you mean—idealism?"

"Why, his putting ideas above money. I think it's splendid the way he wants to help Miss Foraker."

Rowe's fingers touched his chin speculatively.

"That's news to me," he said. "I came up to find out about this pine deal and what backing he wants."

Marcia looked up in a good counterfeit of surprise.

"Am I betraying a secret? I didn't mean to, really!"

"No secret. I'll know in the morning."

He urged gently for more information, but Marcia held it back long enough to whet his curiosity.

"Why, it's simply a matter of ideals," she finally said. "His father, you see, made his fortune by cutting pine. Now, John has been convinced by Miss Foraker that timber can be grown as a crop. He wants to see some of that fortune made out of old pine devoted to growing young pine—and undo some of the damage his father did to this country. He thinks his father owes something to—to the country; only, of course, he won't put it that way to Mr. Taylor. It's a conservation hobby—reforestation."

After a moment Rowe laughed.

"Growing trees to look at, eh?"

"Well, for a time. He isn't sure that it will pay— It isn't profit he is after, anyhow."

"Not profit, eh?"

"Really, Phil, I don't know the details. It's all very big and splendid. It dates away ahead for future generations——"

"Are you sure of this?" Rowe interrupted.

"Sure? Of course! He talked it all the afternoon."

His hand sought her arm and rested there none too lightly.

"And what do you think?" he asked. "What do you think Luke Taylor would say to putting his money into something for—coming generations?"

"It doesn't sound much like him, does it?"

"I guess not!" Rowe laughed harshly. "I guess *not!* He's had me jumping for months switching his investments so they're as good as cash. A bird in hand is worth a half-dozen in the bush to him. Don't you know what this means? Don't you know what Luke will say?"

"Why—what, Phil?"—breathlessly.

"You're right that John has caught the old man's interest. He has made a showing that tickled the old dog; but I knew that he wouldn't go far. I knew he'd make some fool break and have to be satisfied with being a rich man's son in the flesh—and not before the courts—when Luke dies."

"Phil!"

"Listen, Marcia; a new will is ready to be drawn. John is cut off with an annuity—about enough to keep a teamster and his wife in want. I'm to be named as administrator. It's a big job; it'll be fat job!"

He had both her arms in his hands then, gripping their firm flesh. She drew back, alarm in her face—all but the eyes, which were steady and cool and calculating.

"Phil, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying this," he muttered fiercely, bending close to her: "I'm saying that it is Phil Rowe and not John Taylor who will be able to give you the things you want.

Oh, don't deny it! I know you, Marcia, your impulses, your desires! I know that a man must bid high for your love; I know you don't want comfort but luxury, not position but independence.

"Until now I haven't figured with you much. Until now I've been Luke Taylor's bookkeeper, but I've been a good bookkeeper—I've got closer to him than his son ever did, than his son ever can, now. I'll have a chunk of the estate for my—loyalty"—with fine irony. "That means that it's the bookkeeper, not the son, who can make you content and happy."

"Phil, you're trying to buy me!"

"Buy you? Yes!"—as he dragged her to him and slid one arm about her shoulders. She struggled—very briefly, and then stood quiet, stilling the quake of her limbs as he talked into her hair, mingling kisses with words. "All women who are worth while are bought! Do you think I'd want you if you were cheap? John will be cut off— I'll be as good as the old man's heir. And that means—that means you—for me!"

And then she was free, panting, smoothing her hair.

"What are you saying? What are you doing? Why should I let you?" But her eyes reflected no question, and a wicked little flare of trimph ran across her features.

"Because I love you! Because you will love me!" he cried.

"Don't be too sure, Phil." But her voice was without the power of dissuasion. "We must go back now— Don't, Phil— You're hurting me!"

For hours Philip Rowe lay wakeful on the lumpy bed in the Commercial House, first tossing in a fever of desire, later lying quietly while his mind spun.

Marcia Murray had played her hand well—superbly well for a losing hand. She had made the most of what John Taylor had told her, of what she knew of his father's character, and of how Rowe reacted to the news she let him worm from her.

For years Philip Rowe had bent his sharp wit toward gaining a place between the Taylors, father and son. Like young John, he had wanted fortune; but he was not afraid to grub. He had been faithful to Luke—more faithful to himself. He had studied; he had learned; he had watched and waited. On that morning in Detroit when he took notes for the framing of a new will, he believed he had triumphed, but the arrival of the letter from John, telling that he had turned his father's shabby trick to profit, knocked the foundation from beneath his hopes—for a time. He did not give up, though for another it would have been difficult to keep hope alive before old Luke's delight over the change in his boy.

The new will was not drawn, but Rowe knew that behind Luke's reaction to John's success there was persistent skepticism. With the coming of John's letter asking for backing in this vaguely defined new scheme, that skepticism challenged paternal favor. Rowe understood; Rowe watched, closer than ever. He was sent to Pancake to investigate, with the knife of his self-seeking unsheathed, ready to strike at the first weakness Taylor might show.

And now it was so easy! Marcia had given him the best reason for hope that he had encountered in weeks. John Taylor, wanting to use his father's money for the gain of unborn generations! He smiled as he lay there. He would see Luke's face darken, could hear his stinging outburst.

Again his mind went back to Marcia. All winter she had toyed with him in Florida clandestinely; in Detroit he had seen much of her, and the flirtation had been brisk. And to-night for the first time she had surrendered her lips—and after she had passed to him the information which seemed to open the way to an attainment of his dreams.

He sat up abruptly and stared out the window.

Had that been conscious? Had she realized, as he realized, the possibilities of this change in John's ambition? He drew a hand slowly through his hair and laughed quietly.

"You devil!" he whispered, and laughed again, as if he had been fooled—and admired the wit that fooled him.

MARCIA had left by the time Rowe wakened, and Jim Harris was alone in the dining-room when Phil entered. The men spoke gravely across the soiled linen, and Jim rattled his paper and remarked casually on the head-lines as he would to any stranger. But two hours later they stood in Harris's room, looking down into the street where Helen stopped her noisy car to let John Taylor out, and

Harris looked at Rowe and winked as he might have winked at a companion of years.

"Quite a gal—what?" he chuckled. "And may be that explains a lot, Rowe."

The other's lips twitched in a sardonic smile and, though he said nothing, it was evident that he understood.

Taylor did not look at the hotel register, for Henry Wales was at the desk, struggling over one of his uninflammable, pale cigars, else he would have seen the fine signature: "M. Murray, Detroit." That might have added to the trouble that lurked in his eyes, aftermath of yesterday's scene; or, to have linked her name with Rowe's might have been relief. No matter. John did not seek information from the register but asked his question of Henry, who said that Mr. Rowe got in last night, was upstairs now. "This's him"—as steps sounded on the stairs.

Rowe and Harris came down together, and the former suavely greeted John, assured and superior.

"You know Mr. Harris, of course."

Yes; Taylor knew Harris, and as he acknowledged the acquaintance, he looked from one to the other, sensing something of their kinship, but reading no import there—not then.

HARRIS went out. Taylor and Rowe went into the small, hideous parlor of the hotel. They smoked. They talked briskly of Luke and John's mother, of the lumber market, of the season, Rowe waiting like a cat at a mouse-hole, Taylor uneasy.

Suddenly Rowe precipitated matters.

"I've been with your father over seven years, Taylor. I never saw him quite so worked up as he was over your last letter."

"I thought it must have interested him, sending you up here."

John shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Michigan pine is to him—not like red to a bull—like freedom to a Bolshevist, perhaps."

Taylor smiled.

"He's always lived in the past with the pine, Rowe. I thought of that—that it might give him a chance to live in the future."

"Or to live in the present. That would be better. Your father can't have very many years left."

Pause.

"When your letter came in, mentioning Michigan white pine in a big tract, he forgot his cane. He walked up and down the room without it—the first time in years."

"That's fine!"

"He rushed me up here, not because he wouldn't take your word"—with a cautious glance at John—"but because he wants you to speed up the deal. He'll go in with you if the values can be established; he wants camps operating this fall."

John started.

"Camps?"

"Surely. He knows he hasn't much time left. It's been his dream—to finish as he began—cutting Michigan pine—a dream without foundation until now."

Taylor shook his head.

"It's not a question of buying and logging," he said.

Rowe paused in the act of striking a match.

"You don't want to *buy?*"

"It couldn't be bought, in the first place; and it isn't ready for harvest yet. You see, Rowe——"

He sat forward, and for half an hour talked of Foraker's Folly, of the country adjacent. He went into the history of Helen's forest, told what he knew of the forest practise there, of the fire-prevention, of the thinnings, the income and the future plans.

"I see," said Rowe, when he had finished, and looked through the window with a malignant twinkle in his black eyes. "It's a case of—of taking some of the money that was made from Michigan pine to grow more Michigan pine."

"Exactly."

"And—perhaps making some of that fortune perform a duty which most men wouldn't recognize—putting it to work to help pay for some of the ruin it made of this country?"

"You get the idea, Rowe!" Taylor burst out enthusiastically, and stopped short. He did not like the straightening of the other's arm in its coat sleeve as Rowe raised his cigar to his lips. It smacked of a gesture of triumph, and Rowe continued staring through the window.

Before John could say more, Rowe asked, "And how much help will you need?"

"I don't know."

"You haven't anything to go on, then?"—as if disappointed.

"Not yet. You see, Miss Foraker needs help very badly, I think. I—I didn't want to hold out any false hopes to her. I wanted to be sure before I mentioned it."

"I see." Once more that gleam of triumph came into his eyes. "Have you had it estimated?"

"No."

"Your father wired Tolman, his old cruiser, to meet me here. He should be up from Saginaw to-day. It won't take him long to give us something definite and dependable."

"The value's there, all right," John said. "Tolman's report should satisfy father. I suppose he'll want that first."

He had risen.

"Surely," said Rowe lightly enough. "A matter of a few days. And it won't take him long to make up his mind when he hears the facts"—with a light sniff.

"You'll stay on, then?"

"I think not. I'll go out as soon as Tolman gets in, which'll probably be to-night."

They halted on the steps of the hotel.

"I don't suppose, then, there's any chance of buying?" Rowe asked.

"Not one in the world!"

"But if this Miss—Miss Foraker needs help so badly, I should think——"

"You don't know her! She'd lose everything before she'd listen to talk of selling."

"And you wouldn't try to influence her?"

John shook his head emphatically.

"Buying is out of the question, Phil. That's one reason I want to help her—so no man can ever come in and take advantage of her circumstances, force a sale and ruin this plan."

"She's converted you to her idea all right!"

"By Jove, Rowe, she has that! I'd as soon lose my right arm as see that stuff cut now."

"You inspire me!"

They parted, and Rowe went inside to stand by a window watching John swing along the sidewalk.

"Your right arm, eh? Well—by making that crack about your right arm, you may lose your—birthright."

He examined the time-table hanging beside the desk and then entered the telephone-booth. His call was for Miss Murray, at Windigo Lodge.

That afternoon, Jim Harris and Philip Rowe drove north from Pancake. They did not stop at the Harris Development project, though they left the main road there. They went on, along a seldom-used trail, coming eventually to the southwest corner of Foraker's Folly. They left the car and crossed the fire-line and within the shelter of the ranks of pine trees Rowe took a small camera from his pocket. They walked three miles or more through the forest, stopping now and then where the light and perspective were right to preserve for the discontented eyes of Luke Taylor the things which theirs could see.

THEY were together that night at supper, together when the nine-ten arrived, bringing Tolman with a turkey slung over his shoulder. They sat together a half-hour later on the baggage-truck on the station platform, waiting for the south-bound train.

"It's good," said Harris, rolling his cigar with satisfaction, "to have somebody I can talk to without doing a lot of rattlin' around and sidesteppin'. I can help you, Rowe, and I'd sure welcome some other substantial interests to this county."

"I think they're on their way," said his companion. Harris nodded emphatically.

"I think so, too. I hope so. And I'll work to realize that hope. Anyhow, we've got a common interest. I've been a good servant for Pontiac Power and they've given me my chance with a big piece of this development proposition, but, damn it all, they expect me to do all their dirty work up here without any backin'.

"I've protected their interests all right, and I've made some money for myself, but I want to make a lot of money, Rowe—a *lot* of it! I need roads and schools to build up that project; I'm going to have 'em, too—an' when she sees her tax bill—that's going to help you! She won't be able to get her breath when I get through with her!"

He laughed good-naturedly.

"And she's alone? She hasn't any backing?" asked Rowe.

"Not any that's worth a darn except just one old anarchist, Hump Bryant."

"The senator?"

"Yup!"—sourly. "'Course, he and I ain't clashed yet, but it's bound to come. He commenced stirrin' up a dust about timber taxes a few years ago. That was all right; he couldn't get anywhere, and I wouldn't 've kicked on that, anyhow. But now he's spreadin' out and is askin' too many questions about farms that are started and abandoned on these light lands. He wants to start some nutty land-reform movement.

"We'll mix, yet. He's treading mighty close to my bunion. And he's lined up with the gal, all right."

In the far distance the down train whistled, and Rowe stood up, shaking his coat.

"About this other, though? This matter of taxes? You think you're safe there? You've got the supervisors thinking your way?"

Harris laughed.

"*Thinkin'?* Hell, Rowe, these yaps haven't got anything to think *with!* But as for *havin'* them—" He thrust out one hand and held it close to the other's face, fist clenched. "Like that!" he said beneath his breath.

IN OTHER places in Pancake that night Helen Foraker was in the minds of men. In the Bank of Pancake, for one, where Ezam Grainger sat at his desk, securities spread before him, going through the papers, making neat notes.

From the stack of mortgages he took a document. It was a paper covering title to three sections of Foraker's Folly; it was for twenty thousand dollars. It was due, he saw, within three weeks. And when he put it down, he checked it on a list before him and wrote beside it the one word: "Renew."

The door opened and Dr. Pelly came in. Ezam frowned over his glasses to identify the newcomer, then started up eagerly and opened the little gate in the office railing.

"You've been to the house, Doctor?" he asked nervously.

The physician shoved back his derby wearily and took a morsel of chewing-tobacco from a pocket of his unbuttoned vest, winking roguishly.

"Yeah; I've been over to see Lily."

Grainger fidgeted in his chair. His eyes showed, with their eagerness, a rare timidity.

"You two are all het up over nothin'," Pelly said, and the other stiffened as though the pronouncement were an affront. "If I was a young doctor and not a friend, I'd welcome patients like your wife. They've given many a young cub his start. Nothin' better in the way of practise than a nervous woman with plenty of money. Nothin' you can do for 'em; so there's no danger of their gettin' well. Only way you can lose 'em is to fail to take 'em seriously."

He winked again, and the banker cleared his throat.

"Why in Sam Hill don't you an' Lily light out of here?" Pelly asked bluntly. "You can do more for her than I can, Ezam. You an' your car and a part of your income spent liberal-like."

Grainger settled back in his chair, reassured by the confidence in the doctor's tone.

"You've been here since the hills were hollows. You've made your pile. What's the idea of keepin' on?"

"Why—why, a man must keep busy."

"Shucks! You're goin' to dry up and blow away in some hot wind yourself if you don't play a little. Sell your toy bank or give it away or somethin'. You've made your pile; you can play the rest of your life and never think twice about a new pair of shoes if prices never go down. Put Lily in your car, set fire to the house, light out for Maine for the summer, do New York in the fall and see the boy, drop over to California for the winter and maybe give Honolulu the once-over in the spring. Come on back and look in on us in the summer for a few weeks—on your way again!" He waved his hand elaborately. "Simple as skinnin' a cat!"

"You don't understand, Doctor. It's——"

" 'Course I understand! You're in a rut and think th' world depends on your runnin' the Bank of Pancake. Lily's in a rut, too, and Pancake's holdin' her in it. Don't try to tell me there's anything to hold you here but a habit. You know, Ezam, if I was fixed like you are, now——"

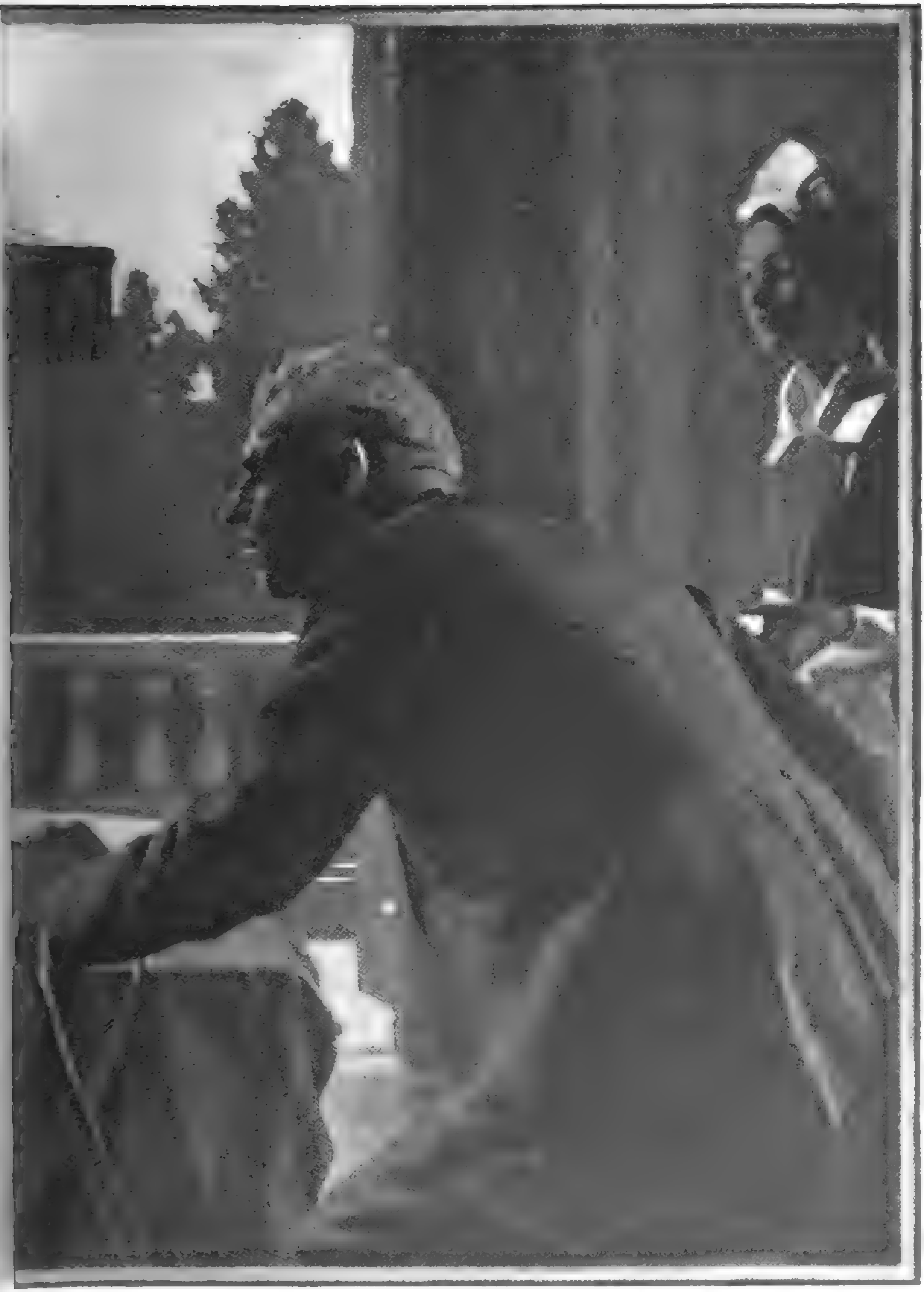
He scratched his head fiercely and spat and winked and ambled on, telling of how he would play, given the opportunity.

The down train stopped and went on. Jim Harris tapped on the window and waved his hand and passed on. Talk within lagged.

"Tim Burdick's wife's due for another kid or so to-night," Pelly said, rising. "Got to get along."

"Maybe there's something in what you say," Ezam admitted. "Our own affairs always seem large. And Lily is all I have,

Luke half rose from his chair, and a purple rage swept into his face. "S



he's one—" A maid entered with a package, and Luke broke off short.

now—she and the bank—" He looked through the window and saw Harris mount the steps of the Commercial House. "Widdemer, the new vice-president of Pontiac Power was in from Bay City the other day. He'd be interested to buy, I think."

Pelly looked sharply at him.

"That so? He made an offer?"

"Well, not exactly. He wanted me to make one."

"That's reasonable. You do it, Ezam. There's nothing wrong with Lily now, but women are funny machines. She's all you got. If she was mine—well, I'd want to give her a chance."

He was grave then, and gave his head a serious twist.

"Pontiac Power wants the bank, eh?" the doctor went on. "Well, they're all right so far as I know, but between you and me and the rest of the town, Ezam, Harris don't wear very well." He shrugged. "I'd hate to think of Thad Parker's wife if I was him—and a lot of other men and women. Hear anything about his new road proposition?"

The banker nodded.

"He wants it—bad," said Pelley.

"He'll get it, then."

"He always has."

"And Foraker's Folly is going to hold the bag?"

"Oh, I don't think he could work that. But maybe he'll make Helen trouble. Humphrey thinks so. He's feelin' the supervisors out, I'm told." The doctor's mouth shut grimly.

"Yes; Hump is getting busy, bless his old hide!"

"Well, most everybody has trouble," Pelly remarked. "Wish everybody had as easy a way out as you have, Ezam. Night. Have another voter for Pontiac Power by mornin', I expect."

The door closed. Ezam went slowly back to his desk and sat there, stiff and prim on the chair, but his eyes dreamed——

AND across the way, in his rooms above the office of the *Banner*, Humphrey Bryant rocked in a chair that lurched sideways each time he swayed forward. His shoes were off, spectacles pushed back on his head. The windows were open, and he sat alone, looking out where the lights of the Commercial House and the unusual gleam from the bank windows threw shadows across the white dust of the street.

On the opposite side of the window was another chair, which he had drawn from its accustomed corner before he sat down—a wooden rocker, stuffed with calico pillows and draped with the same limp material. It had been in that corner ever since the old man began living alone, when Maggie Bryant gave up and was taken out to the plot of barren ground on the edge of the village and buried beneath the jack-pines. Usually that rocker stood in its corner undisturbed weeks at a time, but occasionally there came a night when he would draw the chair out and sit beside and rock, and touch it now and then and talk to it—a great deal.

"She seems more like our own, Maggie," he said, after a time. "I sat looking at her to-day down in the office, and she seemed like our own girl, not like some other man's. And she's in trouble, too—though she don't know the worst yet—and needs a family——

"No, Maggie"—shaking his head—"it won't do to hope too much. Sim Burns has talked a lot and stirred folks up, and maybe if he was inclined to back down now, he couldn't and save his face——

"Looked up the assessed valuation of Chief Pontiac Power to-day. Dams, buildings, key-positions was all I knew. They've got it at two hundred thousand. They've got six millions in the county or I've got six legs."

He rocked a little more violently.

"It's Harris I'm afraid of. He's intelligent and without scruple—which makes a worthy foe. He's shrewd. I've prodded round a little, but they're mighty close with their plans.

"Poor Helen! I don't know. She's always come to see me when she's been in trouble, and I've always been able to help her. But this time—I won't have much to say—maybe nothing."

For long he rocked there, talking to the memory of the woman whose empty rocker was beside him. Late at night he rose and from his vest pocket drew the worn notebook with pages devoted to dates and hours and the names of men. He studied it gravely. On the date at the top of a page he placed a gnarled finger.

"An ace," he muttered. "Always there the first week in the month—when Pontiac Power pays off its other help." He moved his finger to the first column, which recorded the time, and nodded briskly. "Another ace; because there 've never been two at once." He scanned the names written there and riffled the pages, on each of which was set down the personnel of the Board of Supervisors. "A third ace—they were all there—every time—" He closed the book and held it between his old palms.

"And—there's a card in the hole—but I'm afraid to look at it— And threes, even aces, aren't much to bet everything on."

AGAIN the wide room in the Detroit house, with its windows giving on the formal garden, the group of white pines and the river.

Luke Taylor sat there, his eyes fixed on the pines, listening to the deliberate, finely detailed report which his private secretary gave him. For an hour Rowe had talked, making no obvious effort to stress any one point, but watching the eyes that did not watch him, seeing the enthusiasm which had been in them give way to a cold light, watching that light grow hot.

He finished and dropped the memoranda he had used to the table beside him. For an interval the old man did not move, and when his position did change, it was only a turn of the head to set his hard gaze on the other's face.

"You're sure of this, Rowe?"

"I've qualified everything I wasn't sure of."

"And he said that, did he? That he wanted to use my money for this—this damn moonshine?"

"Just as I've told you, sir."

"And that this was his reason—so no man could ever force her to cut until she gets good and ready?"

"Those were his words, as I remember them, sir. He said, too, that he'd rather lose his right arm than see her pine logged off."

Luke stirred, and his palms tapped the arms smartly while he licked his lips.

"So *he's* begun to worry about other generations, has he? So *he's* got to be one of the old women in pants! I s'pose he thinks I'm a devastator, that I was little better than a crook when I took off my pine! So he wants me to use my money to wash away my sins, does he?" He half rose from his chair, and a purple rage swept into his face. "So he's one——"

A maid rapped and entered with a package, and Luke broke off short.

"For you, Mr. Rowe," the girl said.

"These are photographs I took yesterday," Rowe said, breaking the string. "I had the finishing rushed. I knew——"

"Eh? What's this? Pictures of the pine?"

"Yes, sir—see——"

He spread the damp prints on the table before him, and Luke, with unsteady hands, adjusted his spectacles and leaned forward to see. For a lengthy interval he studied the dozen photographs, going from one to the other. Gradually his hands shut down closer on the chair-arms and a snapping light appeared in his blue eyes—a hungry light, a glad light, fierce in its joy.

"Pine!" he muttered almost reverently. "Michigan white pine, Rowe! Baby pine! Good God—it's small—but thick as hair on a dog!" He snatched off his spectacles and snapped, "Tolman was there?"

"Got in last night."

"And when'll he report?"

"To-morrow night, anyhow."

Luke leaned back weakly and breathed rapidly. He drew out his great gold watch and eyed it.

"Twelve o'clock," he whispered. "That means—thirty-six hours." His lips shut as decisively as the case of the watch, with the same sort of definite snap. "Thirty-six hours," he repeated petulantly. "But then—we can't rush this thing. We've got to be sure, Rowe! Don't you go gettin' my hopes up without reason! An' he said, did he, that he'd rather lose a leg than see that stuff cut?"

"It was an arm, sir——"

"Don't be so damned accurate, Rowe! Arm, eh? He's likely to get one whole side tore off!"

At dusk that evening, old man Tolman unpacked his turkey, which he had cached on the bank of a small creek that ran across the plains and into Foraker's Folly. He spread his blankets, built a very small fire, made coffee and fried bacon. He worked deftly, with the precision of a man who has lived well on little, scoured his dishes with sand, dropped a pair of green sticks on the coals and sat down in the smoke to defy the mosquitoes. He lighted his pipe there and puffed slowly, but after several moments his eyes went to the ragged banners of the solid pine behind him, blue-black against the fading rose of the sky, and his puffing became more rapid, almost fevered, and continued so until a sputter from his pipe-bowl indicated that nothing remained but an expiring coal.

He rapped it against the heel of his boot and drew out a package of tobacco. He shook his head and sighed and almost smiled.

"I'll be blistered!" he muttered. "I'll be blistered! Pine! In a stand like that! Old Luke 'll go wild—clean, plumb, hog wild!"

And while Tolman watched, the last glory of the dying day, Helen Foraker held her canoe against the rushes on the inside of a sharp bend in the river while John Taylor in the bow shot his fly out across the swift current to where it milled against the far bank.

All about, the surface was broken as fish rose to feed on hovering insects, but the girl's eyes were fixed on the deep pool across from them, and Taylor's eyes were there as well, and the fly went there again as a fish broke the white-flecked velvet blue of the deep water again and again.

For twenty minutes Taylor sent his fly in, picked it up, tried it by false casts, drove it forward and let it rush over the pool. And the trout kept feeding all about that lure, selecting from the myriads of flies that swept over him only those which meant life—not death.

Rhythmically, like a machine, the man cast, and finally the girl's eyes left the fish to watch him.

And then the fish struck!

With an expulsion of breath like a glad, muffled cry, Taylor's right arm whipped back, above and behind his head. The bamboo bent in a stiff arc. His left hand tooled the line carefully as he gave out, as he took in, and the line itself, where it disappeared into the current, laid back a fin of silvered water as the trout plowed here and there in frantic efforts to be free.

For ten minutes the fish fought with the nobility which only the speckled trout puts into his will to live, and then he came gasping to net.

"Good work!" Helen cried and dropped her paddle. "A beauty! He'll go two pounds. And you did it well!"

Her eyes danced; her red lips parted in a glad smile, and there was rapture in her face which he had never seen there before—the enthusiasm for play—and as he looked at her, leaning forward, one arm stretched out to touch the trout, he saw a new part of her to dovetail with her capability at her work, her tenderness with children. She was at the moment a laughing, spontaneous young animal, lost in admiration of the fish he had caught—and in admiration of him. He knew this last; he could see it in her face.

They went down-stream under the stars, Helen in the bow, singing in her clear voice a chant of the old French boatmen, picked up from some woodsman.

They dragged the canoe out together and their hands touched. It was the first time their flesh had met, and a queer thrill ran through Taylor's body. He took his catch and walked with Helen to her door. She bade him good-night and went within very quietly. He watched her and moved on to the men's shanty, heedless of Pauguk, who whined at her chain's length as he passed.

JIM HARRIS was inside, talking to Goddard. His speech was a bit louder than usual; he was a trifle eager, it seemed to John, to have it known that he had come to inquire after the teams that would soon be finished with the hardwood logs. A few men and horses were needed at the lower dam, he said.

Beauchamp, the cook, and Harris and another gathered about Taylor and commented on his catch. Goddard did not leave his bunk where he sat, elbows on knees, glowering at John. Black Joe, who was sewing a button on a shirt, looked up and grunted in disdain as Taylor proudly held up the big trout.

The cook took the fish to the kitchen. Harris sat down beside Goddard and talked. Two men remained with Black Joe, who, as he drew thread clumsily through the flannel, resumed the talk that Taylor had interrupted.

"Now, how about this here gold mine of Paul's, Joe?" one of them asked.

The old fellow puffed on his short pipe a moment and then began to talk, lowly, haltingly, and those with him listened eagerly, set smiles on their faces.

It was another Paul Bunion story, Taylor knew, and watched and tried to overhear, but could not. Ever since coming into this country he had heard references to Paul Bunion. "Who is he?" he had once asked Helen, and she had laughed. "The Munchausen of the forests, my father used to say. He also said that Paul would be in living literature when the baron was forgotten."

That explained little, but Taylor gathered that Joe was an authority on the great Paul. Night after night he would sit with a few of those who were beyond his scorn, listening while he ambled on. He was saving of his tales, though, reserving them only for those who stood in his favor. Taylor had tried to join the group, but each attempt had caused Joe to drop into sullen silence, broken only when John withdrew.

As he fussed aimlessly about his bunk, Taylor watched Harris and Goddard. Jim talked confidentially, easily, and Goddard listened, smoking a cigar, evidently flattered by the attention. But that attention was not wholly for Goddard, because Jim's eyes went from time to time to Black Joe. And when the two who listened to the story of the gold mine laughed heartily, Harris stopped talking altogether and smiled and gave evidence of a certain restlessness.

Beauchamp came in and prepared to shave. Harris rose and walked toward Joe's bunk.

"Joe, have a cigar," he said.

The woodsman stopped talking. He eyed Harris slowly as he had first eyed John Taylor. He removed his pipe and said:

"Who? Me? I promised my mother I'd never smoke 'em!"

Harris rumbled a laugh, but flushed, for the contempt in Joe's manner was unmistakable.

"All right, then; I'll keep 'em for the wicked, Joe. Go on with your story"—sitting down.

"Story? · What story?" Joe asked, black eyes blazing, and turned away and put the gnawed pipe-stem between his teeth and smoked in confusing silence.

Harris attempted to recover his poise, but he did not urge a resumption of the tale and soon was gone, followed as far as his waiting car by Goddard.

Beauchamp was laughing as he lathered his face and winked at John.

"Py gosh, Jim Harris she don' nefer get Joe to tell heem 'bout Paul Bunion." He lifted two fingers of the hand which held the razor. "For two year, now, he come here for Joe to tell heem 'bout Paul. He beg Joe for to tell. For two year she try to catch Joe in town an' maak heem talk 'bout Paul. Wan taam, before she go dry, he maak Joe drunk an' try, but Joe"—shaking his head—"she don' gife wan dam for Jim Harris. She nefer say wan word 'bout Paul when he's roun'.

"I tell heem, Joe you wan beeg fool. Jim Harris pay you money for to tell 'bout Paul. But Joe he don' care 'bout money. Py gosh, I can' maak much from dat man, Joe.

"An' Jim Harris— Py damn; dat's all he wan' dat he don' git: Joe, for to tell heem 'bout Paul Bunion! Eferybody in Pancake, she know what Harris wan' an' what he can' get!"

He shrugged and lifted the razor to his cheek.

JIM had driven away and Goddard stood alone. He glanced within the men's shanty and saw Taylor talking to the cook. One of the great hands at his side closed slowly, and he walked away toward the big house where Helen sat at her desk, turning idly the pages of a lumber-trade journal.

"Did you have a good time fishing?" he asked.

She had looked up at his entrance; at his tone she dropped her eyes.

"Yes, Milt; we made a nice catch."

He laughed shortly.

"I notice you haven't took time to fish with me this spring."

"No; we've both been very busy."

"Yeah. Both of us. But you ain't too busy to go out with Taylor."

"That is entirely uncalled for, Milt. You do so much to make it unpleasant for me. I don't think it is fair in you, and I don't like it, because—you haven't the right."

The hand at his side closed tightly again.

"No right," he growled. "Maybe not. Before he come up here, though, you used to think enough of me."

"I thought of you then as I do now—as a good friend, as a loyal friend, as a man who has done more for me in the actual work than any one else."

"Nothing else?" he demanded.

She looked down and shook her head.

"Nothing else, Milt. You should know that. You have tried to persuade me to think—differently of you. It—it has made it very hard for me, because I don't want to hurt you—and I can't——"

"And yet you'll run around with this—this"—gesturing toward the men's shanty.

"Which is my own affair," she said simply. "I'm sorry; but there must be a limit to what I let you say."

"Maybe that's what interests me," he said, narrowing his eyes and leaning over the desk. "Maybe I'm interested because it's your own affair and what happens to you—means a lot to me"—voice dropping to a whisper. "I don't want you to make any mistakes that you'll be sorry for."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

His baseless innuendo had struck the mark. She believed that it was backed by something other than his helpless jealousy. He flushed hotly and stood erect.

"Never mind what I mean," he said. "Maybe I can't tell you—just to-night. I don't want to say anything against anybody until I'm sure."

"But you make hints"—insistently.

"Yes; I'd do a lot to help you—Helen."

"I know that, Milt," she said. "I know you'd do anything for me. There is—there is nothing between Mr. Taylor and me. Please believe that." Her color had mounted.

"I know there ain't—much—yet—" he mumbled. "I don't want there to be, because——"

"I'm waiting—" when he did not finish.

He looked up at her, and was again assured when he saw the sober query in her face.

"So am I—waitin' to be sure. But I'd take a chance at being wrong, at being unfair to anybody for you—unfair to anybody, let alone him!"

An hour later the lights were out, and in the men's shanty snores were heavy; but Goddard lay awake, flushed with helpless anger. It was little satisfaction to know that his groundless warning had troubled Helen. The time might come when he would be called on to explain.

There in the lamplight she had looked so lovely, so wonderful! She was not his kind; she was finer, gentler, of different stuff, but for five years he had served her loyally, had worked night and day, had fought for her on occasion; and through those years he had come to covet her, come to picture without good reason her life united with his. There had been no opposition, no competition except the gulf between them until this Taylor came. From the first he had sensed the fact that the city man was nearer Helen than he ever could come, and he loved as he had never before—and he hated as he did not know that he could hate.

SO PASSED Tuesday. And Wednesday passed, fair and clear and peaceful overhead in the forest; the last of the rafts were coming down the river without trouble or delay; the band-saw in the mill ate steadily through the good logs; the piles of lumber beside the track grew. There was no hint of trouble, and the shaking that John Taylor's very soul had undergone in his scene with Marcia steadily subsided under three influences: The first was the fact that he had made peace with himself; the second, that he had won his father's trust and interest in his plan, so in a matter of days he would be able to tell Helen Foraker that the threat which Sim Burns held over her could be met with a laugh, and the third influence was the girl of the forest herself, whose charm and consequence grew hourly, bringing a strange combination of peace and restlessness.

But Wednesday evening Jim Harris's car rolled out toward Foraker's Folly again and picked up Tolman, who, his turkey packed, stood beside the unused road, waiting. Two hours later the old cruiser sat in the telephone-booth in the Commercial House, pouring his information over the wire into the ear of Luke Taylor, who clutched the receiver and strained forward, whose eyes glittered avidly as he listened, and whose responses were short, profane and joyful.

Thursday afternoon John was in Pancake, billing out another shipment of his lumber, arranging for more cars. He finished and stood in the small ticket-office making some necessary notes when the telegraph-key set up an insistent clamor. The agent cut in and answered, slipped blanks into his typewriter and began to take.

John started out.

"Wait! This is for you," the man said.

Taylor closed the door and stood beside the operator's chair, reading his name and address as it went down, letter by letter.

And then came this:

> Rowe says you would rather lose right arm than see pine you brought to my attention cut. If you want to help me in logging this piece, I will use you. If not, get away from the wheels. They are going to go round, and you will regret reckless offer of anatomy in name of moonshine.
>
> L. TAYLOR.

He took the yellow sheet and stared blankly at the typed message. He heard the operator say, "Sign this," in a voice that came from a great distance. He walked out of the station and stood on the platform, reading the warning again, numb and bewildered.

Luke Taylor wanted Foraker's Folly! His father, who had experienced his highest moments when his men were taking pine forests from the Michigan valleys, who had grumbled since John could remember that there was no joy in living, who had dreamed aloud of Michigan pine, who had wistfully, irately voiced the futile wish that he might finish his years as he began his ascendency to fortune—harvesting more of the pine which had made him a power; his father saw happiness at last in Helen Foraker's pine! His father wanted to do that which John had wanted to make forever impossible! His father, greedy, stubborn, powerful even in his worn-out body, wanted to possess and cut that timber, making of the forest lumber—and blackened slashing.

"O God!" he muttered. "I wanted to help—and I brought this on her!"

He walked over to the bank to make a deposit. He heard Ezam Grainger say to a farmer:

"No; she isn't so well to-day. Yes; I've sold and am going to take her right out of here"—and clear his throat and blink rapidly to keep the mist of worry from his eyes.

Taylor gave no heed; no more did he know what Jim Harris said when they met on the bank steps or what Henry Wales said when he entered the Commercial House to call Detroit by telephone.

It seemed hours before the connection was made. He walked the office floor and read and reread that telegram; the paper grew wet from the nervous moisture of his fingers, and finally the letters themselves blurred before his eyes as the import of what he had done revealed its awful possibilities. Better anything than this: Luke Taylor, the destroyer, with his will and fortune, set against Helen Foraker, playing a lone hand.

The telephone-bell whirred.

"Yes; Taylor?"

It was Rowe's voice.

"I was calling father, Phil."

"He understands that. He wants me to talk for him."

"Isn't he there?"

"Right here beside me."

"Then let me talk to him, please!"

Pause. He heard Rowe's voice, much fainter: "He insists on talking to you, sir." Another voice, but he could not distinguish the words; then,

"Your father wants to know if you still think more of that pine forest than you do of your right arm?"

"I—I haven't changed my mind."

A wait; hollow, indistinct voices. Then:

"I will be up again Sunday. Your father says if you change your mind you may talk it over with me then. I have authority to deal for him."

His voice was very even, impersonal, but somehow it stung John as though it had been a crow of triumph.

"Very well, Rowe," he said. "I will talk to you Sunday. Good-by."

He walked from the hotel, and Humphrey Bryant appeared in the doorway of his office rather excitedly.

"Going back soon?"

"As quick as I fill up with gas."

"Stop in, will you? I've a note for Helen."

HE TURNED back into the office, drawing his spectacles down from his forehead, a thin lock of white hair standing high above his pink scalp. He seemed hurried and flustered, and when Taylor returned for the message he thought the bright blue eyes looked at him almost with hostility. Surely trouble was in them, and the old editor was curt in his manner.

And all the way home Taylor drove doggedly. A part of him wanted to turn back, to go away, to leave this mess which he had brought down upon Foraker's Folly. Oh, he had wanted to help, and he had brought the ideal which was represented in the pine face to face with a hungry power which was its worst enemy! He had wanted to help and had done the worst he could have done by consciously planning harm. He had wanted to lighten the burden on Helen's shoulders and had increased it to a crushing weight. So he wanted to run—to run.

That was the mean part of him; that was the impulse which was out of the question. There was but one thing for him to do: Tell her; face the fact; stand beside her and fight his father—with his inexperience and his bare hands. A sudden emptiness came about his middle, as though strength had drained from his vitals.

HELEN was not at home when he entered, prepared to blurt out his confession. He left the note from Bryant on her desk and went out, so absorbed in his problem that he even forgot Pauguk and went too close and had to leap beyond her reach as she rushed at him, snarling wickedly.

He could not eat that night, and Beauchamp made much of his bad appetite, complaining half in fun as he brought food to the table.

"Ah, well," the Frenchman said finally, nodding his head, "I unnerstan', M'sieu Taylor. Eet iss spring. All de bird, she buil' nest; all de animal, she maak lofe. An' a yo'ng man, she feel her 'eart turn ofer, too. Eh?"

He laughed and others laughed, and John flushed. He was conscious of Goddard's eyes on him with glowering ill temper.

Helen did not return until after dusk. Taylor had been walking the river-bank, miserable and at once impatient and filled with dread. He saw her standing beside her desk, scanning intently a single sheet of paper. He ran forward. His rap was most perfunctory; he opened the screen and stepped in.

She turned and faced him and he saw fright in her face that chilled his heart. Just for that instant, and then she turned and went across the room, saying,

"I can't talk to you—Mr. Taylor—to-night."

Did she know? Was she aware of what he had done? He managed to say,

"Wait, Helen!" There was that in his husky tone which checked her against the far door. Breath clogged in his throat, but he heard himself saying, "Tell me why you can't talk to me."

He crossed the room toward her, bound to hold her there if necessary, to tell his wretched story quickly, to save himself not at all and to offer all he had to offer as help.

He was decisive, showing a strength she had not seen before, a power which held her there. He stopped within arm's length of the girl and looked into her face. There was no anger there, no resentment—just misery. She was unpoised; she was shaken.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Why can't you talk to me? I've got to know—because I have something to say to you."

He spoke swiftly, with desperate assurance, but the desperation did not carry to her—only the assurance. He seemed strong, big, and so much in earnest, with no humility, no deference. She held the paper she had been reading toward him with a gesture that was almost timid.

"That explains," she said and stood there, fingers spread on her breast while he moved nearer the light to read.

It was the note he had brought from Humphrey Bryant, written on a sheet of newsprint:

> DEAR HELEN: I can't trust the telephones and must stay on the job to do what I can, so this news must go to you by note. Gird yourself for fighting and trouble.
>
> A special meeting of the supervisors is called for Saturday, set ahead two weeks, I understand, because I have been trying to head it off. They will take action to submit the bonds for roads and a new court-house at the next election. If this goes through, it will be hard to stop their pillaging, for we have not been mistaken in the property which they expect will pay the bill.
>
> To make matters worse, Harris got wind of my activities against the proposal and has invited the entire board to a fishing-party at the lower dam. They are having a high time, well guarded. I daren't leave town for fear of missing a chance to get at them when he is not there.
>
> Troubles never come singly. Pontiac Power has bought Grainger out. Your mortgage is due this month, and I am trying to get Grainger to renew it himself before he leaves town with his wife, who is sick.
>
> There is no use playing ostrich because a storm is coming. Keep a stiff upper lip and get *mad!* If we keep mad enough, we can weather this crisis and we know nothing worse can happen.
>
> Yours to the last ditch,
>
> H. B.

Taylor looked up, brows gathered.

"'Nothing worse can happen,'" he quoted, looking again at the page.

She began to speak, but he could
her. Nothing worse could happ

the chicanery of Jim Harris, the scheming of these backwoods politicians, the misfortune of having her mortgage in unsympathetic hands were inconsequential details compared to what he had to tell her.

Her words swam into his consciousness:

"So I've thought all along it was something to meet—later. I might have known that they wouldn't delay, that it would come now, not next month, not next year. But somehow"—spreading her hands—"I haven't had the courage to bring it close and tell myself that the danger was here—and real. I've grown a little tired, like my father grew tired; I've had a lot to meet—and now this comes."

Her eyes were very wide as she looked into his and shook her head slowly; her chin trembled.

"And this other. If I can't renew that mortgage"—with a helpless lift of one hand. "Twenty thousand dollars! I couldn't raise a thousand. And my father's work—our hopes— Oh, I feel so much alone!"

Her arms were half extended as she stopped. She averted her face, but he saw the tears spring from her eyes; she whirled and pressed fingers against her cheeks, back toward him, stooped over. For a moment Taylor stood there stunned. She was broken by what Bryant had written her—and if he should tell what he had to tell, what he had come to tell? That would be cruelty now, he told himself; it would be heartlessness not to spare her further suffering for a few hours at least. And while he waited, helpless to help her, her breath caught; it was not a sob, for her eyes were dry, but it indicated that something within her was at the breaking-point.

The sound was like the bite of a lash and he stepped forward, reached out his hands, checked the gesture and left them hovering over her shoulders. For an instant he was so and then drew back, afraid to touch her, lost, knowing no word to say, no move to make; and then he found his palms on her arms, gripping roughly, turning her about, and the feel of her flesh under his fingers clarified everything.

"Helen!" he cried. "Helen, you're not alone! I'm here, with you. I'm going to stay. I'm going to help you!"

She looked up in wonder at the manner of his voice. He had spoken no boast, no empty promise; there was a modesty, a simplicity about him which indicated strength, ability, earnestness, and she read those qualities in his face. For the first time she saw maturity there; for the first time she was almost in awe of him.

She felt his hands gripping her arms. She felt herself drawn forward, close and closer to him, and put out her hands, not to hold her body away but to place them against his breast, pressing her finger-tips into his flesh. Her lips were parted, breath light and quick. She felt his arms go about her almost roughly, saw his face darken and heard his voice, thick and husked with passion.

"I won't let them harm you!" he said tensely. "I'll stand by you. I don't know much—yet; I'm young, but I'm strong, and with you to fight for, I can do anything!"

He trembled. She was there in his arms, submissive. He closed his eyes and shook his head as though fearful that this would not endure a moment of sightlessness; but she was there when he opened them. This was real; this was no vagary of his distressed mind—and he laughed.

That laugh roused Helen, and she drew back.

"John!" she said, under her breath. "John, what is—this?"

She backed away, one arm extended, the other across her breast, and stopped, the length of a stride from him.

"Don't you know?" he muttered. She did not speak, and he advanced slowly until he was looking down into her uplifted face. "Don't you know?" She did not answer, and he took one of her wrists in his hand savagely. "Helen! Don't you know—now?"

HER breath was driven from her lungs as he wrapped his arms about her fiercely, and that breath, escaping through lips and nostrils, was hot on his cheek as it lowered to hers—as hot as his lips on her mouth.

She closed her eyes and let her head fall back.

"Yes, I know—now," she whispered.

Her eyes opened and looked into his; for a long moment their gazes clung, and in that look was an understanding which made words inadequate, unnecessary. But words followed, in low voices, in broken sentences.

"And you came—when I needed you

so!" she said, in a thin, strained voice. "I need you, John. I'm going—to depend on you—so much—so much!"

He tried to hold her even closer, but she took her arms from about his neck and drew away, back toward the door.

"I need you so badly—and I've needed you for so long—I guess—that I can't have you near me to-night, John—not to-night—not this night!"

He followed impulsively to the door, but it closed in his face.

"Please! Please!" he heard her say through it. He made no move. The sound of her steps died. He stood alone in the room, hands at his sides opening and closing slowly.

And in the darkness outside, Milt Goddard, who had spied and seen all, fingered the bit of the ax he had taken from the wood-pile.

Taylor started across the room to the door and Goddard crouched and crept forward—and stopped. John opened the screen.

The ax dropped from the other's hands; he backed slowly, putting a great trunk of white pine between himself and Taylor. Then he turned and stumbled into the night muttering, "I ain't got the nerve—I ain't got th' nerve to kill him!"

IN SUCH a manner happiness was born of turmoil.

Helen Foraker had taken young Taylor in her hands and unconsciously molded him into the man she would have. He had grown; he had changed, and though he had yet to prove his mettle, he bore rich promise. And when he came in her darkest hour and placed his strength in her cause, she found that she needed the things a man, so molded, could give. Not his help first, but his love, his trust, the sanctuary of his arms.

But Taylor held that secret which he dared not tell the girl, and that night, even while the glory of her yielding lips still stirred fever in his blood, he felt the mounting of apprehension.

"I went to sleep feeling so secure last night," she told him, in the early day. "I felt that Jim Harris—no one can hurt me now. I told you once that there were impulses in my heart that had never—had an opportunity to grow. This one, John, is the strongest of them; it has been repressed more than any other—repression gave it strength. Its breaking free was so sudden, so overwhelming—I didn't dare stay—last night." She put her face against his shoulder.

There had been no restraint, no shyness in her greeting. He had her in his arms when she spoke, and she could feel him tremble at her words, but before he could reply, Black Joe came up the steps and gave his curt little bob.

"Say, Helen; will you tell her that th' boys at th' mill found a bee-tree, and if she wants any honey, I cattalate she'd better send th' kids down with a bucket."

"Yes, Joe; I will tell her."

The woodsman went, and she moved close to Taylor again.

"It's funny, but it's heart-breaking," she said. "That is what misunderstanding will do. For twenty years they haven't spoken, and they loved twenty years ago. A misunderstanding came, and probably they've both forgotten what it was now. Stubborness has kept them apart and made them both sour. My father said that Aunty May used to be the gayest girl on the Blueberry and that Black Joe always sang. Their quarrel came, and they haven't spoken since. Each is only holding out for the other to break the silence and growing more bitter and older—Aunty May trying to make another woman's children ease her heartache, Joe hiding the hurt under his crustiness, and living only for the nursery.

"We can't ever risk a misunderstanding, can we?"

She looked at him closely.

"Why, John, what is it?"—startled.

"What is what?"

"You look so—so *strange!*"

He was conscious that he was flushing—flushing because the thing he kept from Helen for her own peace of mind was a fertile nucleus for misunderstanding. But she was on her way to Pancake even then, to learn more of the menaces which hung over her forest. He could not tell her now. So he laughed her startled question away and watched her drive down the road.

It was night when she returned, mouth set, eyes serious.

"It looks dark," she said hoarsely, in answer to his question. "Darker than ever. All last night and all to-day Humphrey

Bryant has tried to get in touch with the different supervisors, but Jim Harris has them all down at the big dam where they can't be reached. He has heard that Humphrey was trying to block his game, and fixed it so we couldn't get to any of the board until it meets. And then Harris will be there, and he holds them in the hollow of his hand.

"If he could be locked up, driven away from that meeting for Humphrey to get at them— He has something up his sleeve—some little thing—such a faint hope that he won't even confide in me! All he asks is ten minutes alone with the board—and he might as well ask for help from Harris!"

It was later in the evening that Taylor walked aimlessly toward the nursery. He had not seen Black Joe there, and was almost on the humped figure which prodded in a seed-bed before he noticed the old fellow.

Joe looked up, gave a contemptuous sniff, and began gathering his few implements, for it was nearly dark. He went off toward the men's shanty without looking at Taylor.

John walked on and stood looking absently down the rows of transplants a few moments and then retraced his steps until a movement in the ground attracted him. He watched and saw the stirring of a mole as it made slow progress. It went beneath the path and entered a seed-bed where stood pine trees no higher than a man's finger is long. Taylor watched the tiny trees heave before the disturbance, saw their hairlike roots break through the loam. He removed his pipe and looked toward the shanty for Joe.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "That'll hurt 'em."

He walked quickly out of the nursery.

Joe was on the deacon bench, filling his pipe. Two of the men were with him, and Taylor knew that the woodsman was settling himself for a yarn. He hesitated as Joe looked up at him with indifference, but he went on down the room and stopped by the group.

"I was in the nursery, Joe," he said, "and I saw something you might want to know. There's a mole in one of the seed-beds, and——"

No chance to finish. Joe was on his feet, hurrying toward the door.

"Come on!" he snapped, when John did not follow. "Show me where!"

Taylor followed at a trot as Joe hastened across the open space and in the dusk searched for the telltale evidence in the soft earth.

"There. See?"

Joe had seen the welt and the disturbed trees, and he began to curse steadily, frightfully, as he floundered about in the darkness.

"Go back to th' shanty an' git somethin'!" he snapped. "Somethin' to make a widder mole. An ax or anythin'. Cut an' run for it!"

Taylor cut and ran, passing the two who had been with Joe inside and who had followed in a leisurely manner. A broadax was inside the door, the first implement John saw; he seized it and ran back.

Then followed a tense interval with Joe, ax upraised, stooping over the seed-bed, watching in the growing darkness for the movement which would betray the intruder's presence. John kept close by him, also on the watch for movement in the soil, and once Joe pushed him aside.

"Git away," he complained, "or you'll git hurted along with this here blind devil!"

JOHN stood back then, but he remained there while night came. The other two sauntered away, uninterested in the affair which had roused Joe to such excitement. The old fellow kept up his vigilance, ax ready to strike, muttering to himself, until it was no longer possible to see. Then he straightened and looked about, saw Taylor, and grunted.

"Damn him to hot hell!" he whispered. "He'll ruin this here bed if he gits a chanct."

It was the closest to a friendly comment he had ever made, and John moved closer.

"Sh," Joe warned. "Keep still! He's here some'eres an' we got to watch. You git a lantern; I'll stand guard."

John returned to the shanty and came back with the lighted lantern. Again they searched, but without results, and then Joe directed John to follow the mole's trail to the boundary of the nursery and tramp it down carefully, while he kept up his vigilant watch.

Fifteen minutes passed; a half-hour; no more indication of the mole.

"He's here yet," Joe whispered. "We gotta wait. Here; gi'me that lantern."

Joe placed it on the ground so that they could see. Then he lowered his ax and stood by, straightening for the first time.

"I reckon mebbe we could set down," he whispered and dragged a cracker-box toward the lantern. "We'll watch, an' we'll sure slay him th' first move he makes."

In his plan he was including Taylor, on whom he had always looked with scorn.

John settled himself with a fresh pipe and Joe sat beside him, silent, eyes on the damaged bed, ax in his hands. Twice he started up sharply; once he rose and stood crouched over the place, ax upraised, ready to strike, holding his breath; then sank back to the box with a muttered curse.

He looked at Taylor closely and for a long moment, then down at the ax, and something like chagrin flickered in his eyes.

"Anybody who didn't have good sense 'uld think a feller was crazy to carry on like this," he said, straightening a leg and again looking at the mighty weapon with which he planned to kill the small rodent, "but these here seeds was special selected, an' we can't let no damned mole spoil our work."

John sensed that Joe feared he might be making himself absurd and wanted to avoid that impression at any cost.

"That's right," he said slowly; "we'll get him."

Joe nodded.

"We'll set here all night, but we'll git him. 'Course, with ordinary seedlings a man wouldn't set out all night," he went on after a bit, "but these here's diff'rent—special select; somethin' me an' Foraker started long time ago, an' me 'nd Helen's been keepin' up."

John watched him; Joe was talking without much reserve after those weeks of aloof scorn.

"Y' see"—gesturing with his paper of tobacco—"I took these here seeds from trees that was naterally whoopin' her up, growin' like weeds. Me 'nd Foraker—'nd Helen now—thinks mebbe we c'n work trees like th' gov'm't works wheat an' corn—git th' seed from th' best stock."

"That sounds reasonable," said John.

Joe looked at him sharply, as though suspecting Taylor of being skeptical, but he saw the genuine regard for his idea in the younger man's face and looked away and sighed with satisfaction.

"I thought mebbe you had a *little* sense," he said.

Taylor smiled and buttoned his coat.

"You can't do much in a short time, though, can you?" he asked.

"Twenty years, mebbe; mebbe more. Foraker used to say a lifetime." Shrug. "Me 'nd him 'nd Helen are th' only ones—besides th' perfessers—who've got sense enough to git int'rusted."

"Maybe you'll let me in on that, Joe. I'm interested. There are so darned many big things going on round here than a greenhorn can't show an interest in them all at once. Where'd you find the seed-bearers you wanted?"

Joe told him at length—told of their experiments, the data they had assembled, warming to his subject, all but forgetting the mole. He no longer looked away from Taylor, but peered closely into his face and answered questions and talked—and talked—and talked——.

FOR years he had worked in that nursery, tending his seedlings as he would so many children, talking to few but Helen and her father about his work, finding none but them and professional foresters who were interested in what he was doing. He took a pride in those accomplishments and was hungry for appreciation; he could talk to the men of the crew about logging, could tell his Bunion tales and find an interested audience. But with the matters closest to his heart there was no outlet—until now, when this city boy sat beside him on a cracker-box, watching for a mole, listening, unafraid to betray ignorance by questions.

Lights went out in the shanty; sounds of men ceased. The moon came up, and still the two sat, collars up, for the night was cool, whispering, watching the seed-bed for the stirring that would end their vigil.

And then Joe talked of the forest, what it had been, what it was and might be; of Foraker himself and of Helen. Men can say worlds about women with the use of a few simple words.

"She's a good girl," Joe said. "She—Look there!"

His whisper was the barest breath. They rose together, creeping toward the lantern. There was no wind; their movements were of the lightest, but in the center of the bed was a stirring, a heaving among the little trees.

The ax rose slowly; it was poised, and

then it swept down and buried itself in the earth.

"Got him!" cried Joe. "Got him!"—as he turned back the earth with the blade.

Carefully he made temporary repairs to the damage in the bed and then picked up the lantern.

"Now we'll hit th' bunks, Johnny," he chuckled. "A good night's work, lad!"

They walked slowly toward the men's shanty, shoulder to shoulder, like old friends. Before the door, Taylor said:

"There's one thing I want to put to you, Joe. You're the only man I can go to with it, and it's about—Helen. You'd do a lot for her, wouldn't you, Black Joe?"

"Who? Me? Dyin' would be easy—for her!"

He went on, haltingly, to extol the girl's virtues, and Taylor smoked thoughtfully, some of the perplexity that had been in his gathered blows, even during that successful venture into a new friendship, departing, a strange sort of twinkle in his eyes, and when Joe stopped, Taylor looked about to see that they were unobserved and lowered his voice and talked; and Joe nodded and grunted, and once he cursed heavily, forbiddingly. Joe began to question—to plan in whispers.

"Sure, I know! I allus watch 'em as I don't like. I know his habits— He's chased after me—chased— An' I wouldn't talk to him—not before—" He laughed silently.

SATURDAY was a lazy day. There was little breeze, little movement of any sort, and bluebottle flies droned in the office of the Blueberry *Banner*.

Humphrey Bryant sat in his chair, arms hanging limp from their shoulders, one foot resting on its side, the other leg sprawled before him.

It was nearly noon. All day yesterday, all the night before he had worked to batter down the defense that Jim Harris had built about the individuals of his Board of Supervisors—*his* by right of possession. It had availed nothing. Bryant had watched them come into town, watched them gather at the court-house, and he could see them now, in the upper corner-room of the red building, moving about as they got at the work before them.

That he could see, and something else—the feet of Jim Harris propped against the window-sill as he tilted his chair backward and let the machinery of legislation grind its way—the way he had directed. Those feet rested idly enough, lazily enough, but Bryant knew that they were ready to stamp down upon any challenge that might be flaunted, that Harris would not leave that meeting until the motion to adjourn had carried, that it was such vigilance that had made him valuable to Pontiac Power and a menace to honest men.

And the old editor was slumped listlessly in his chair, riffling the pages of that worn note-book, because he was an old man—and a shrewd old man. Being old, he had lost his best vigor; being shrewd, he did not deceive himself. His heart did not falter, but he tried to see clearly, and he read in those contented feet a barrier against which any javelin he might hurl in the cause of Right would crumple and fall.

The morning freight came down, and John Taylor and Black Joe, who had swung aboard at Seven Mile, dropped off and walked up First Street. Taylor looked into the *Banner* office.

"Have dinner with us?" he asked.

"No thanks, Taylor. Chained to the desk to-day."

There was no laugh in the blue eyes, and they did not rest long on Taylor's face. They were fixed on those feet in that court-house window. John and Black Joe went on.

"Chained to his desk," Joe muttered and laughed. "And his eyes glued on that tin court-house!"

They entered the pool-room. It was a dingy, smelly place, with two battered tables on a littered floor that still bore the faint marks of river-boots. The cigar-case was fly-specked and broken and patched.

Joe eyed the stock of cigars.

"What seegar is it Jim Harris smokes?" he asked. "He give me one onct——"

"This one, Joe," the greasy-faced proprietor said. "Fifteen-centers. Good stuff, that; none better. Jim always buys here"—proudly. "Comes in after every meal."

"That so? Always comes here, eh?"

"Yup. Says I know how to keep tobacco, an' Jim sure ought to know."

"He sure ought," said Joe, putting the cigar in his pocket and bringing out his pipe and tobacco.

The two retired to a bench in the window and talked, heads close together.

Noon. Movement on the court-house steps as the board ajourned for dinner and trooped together to the Commercial House to eat with Jim and on Jim.

Harris was in high feather. This morning the resolutions had been drawn as he had planned; this afternoon the board would pass them as he had planned. Within sixty days the county would bond itself for a new court-house, which was a sop to the community pride, and the roads, which would speed the settling of that waste land to the northward with more wretched families.

After the meal, Harris bought cigars for the board members at the hotel desk. He did not take one for himself, and when the others started back toward the court-house, he lumbered across the street to the pool-room, waving his hand and saying that he would be along directly.

He meant that. But he was forced to wait for attention, because the proprietor sat on the wide window-ledge. Beside him was Lucius Kildare. On the bench facing them sat Black Joe, pipe in his hands, leaning forward, talking earnestly. John Taylor occupied the rest of the bench, and another lounger leaned over the back, grinning broadly.

Black Joe's gaze was directed at the face of the pool-room owner, and he held the man's attention even after he knew that the great Jim Harris waited.

Then the proprietor broke away, and Joe leaned back and puffed while Harris took a handful of cigars from the box. Silence.

"An' you never heerd tell 'bout Paul's mule-team?" Joe asked Taylor.

"Never."

Joe shook his head and clicked his tongue.

"My Lord, you're ignerent!" he said, and hitched about to face Taylor—and see Harris.

He waited a moment before he began to talk, prefacing his tale by a moment of suspense, as is the way with the best spinners of yarns. Harris, biting off the end of his cigar, watched. There had been no unfriendly stare from Black Joe this time; there seemed to be no barrier between the woodsman and any who might be within ear-shot. For months, Jim Harris had awaited such a moment.

He looked down the street. The last of the supervisors was disappearing within the court-house. Had Joe waited another instant, Jim might have gone on to join them. But Joe did not wait. He began to talk, slowly, deliberately. He told his story of Paul's mule-team as the Bunion stories have been told for two generations in the Lake states.

And Jim Harris waited and listened, wanting to go, putting aside his caution from moment to moment because Black Joe was recounting the adventures of this mythical logger, and to hear any of Joe's kind and generation tell these tales is to be blessed.

When the tale was finished, Harris leaned against the door and his eyes swam with tears as he laughed. He took out his watch and gave a start of surprise. More than half an hour had been consumed in the telling.

Joe looked at Taylor, and the younger man nodded, after he had glanced into the street, toward the court-house. At that, Black Joe got up and drew a paper of tobacco from his pocket.

"Joe, that's a good yarn," said Harris, drawing a handkerchief to wipe his eyes.

"Yup. Paul was quite a lad. He never let anythin' interfere with his work."

"More than I've done"—sliding his watch to a big palm. "I'm overdue—a half-hour."

Still chuckling, making brief farewells, he departed. Joe and Taylor watched him swing along the board sidewalk. They could see the supervisors through the open window of their room; and one figure was in the street—the figure that John had seen as Joe brought his story to a finish—Humphrey Bryant, walking slowly from the court-house toward the *Banner* office, slowly—but not like an old man—with a spring in his stride, and his thin plume of white hair waved triumphantly above his scalp.

HUMPHREY BRYANT had not eaten, had not left his desk. He watched the supervisors trail toward the Commercial House, with Jim Harris in the lead. Watched the town merchants one by one lock their doors and go home for dinner—and then sat there, staring blankly at the picture of Pingree on the blue calcimined wall.

He was not conscious that so much time

passed. Time seemed to speed that day, drawing events after it in a dizzying swirl, portentous events bearing great consequence for him and Helen Foraker beneath their surface, and he roused with a start as Sim Burns strolled along the walk on his way back from dinner. Wes Hubbard was with him and Art Billings and the others. Finally, Henry Wales, fretting with his pale cigar, hastened along as the clock on Bryant's office wall struck one.

The old man rose and went to the door. Through the open court-house window he saw the supervisors moving about their room. He watched and waited. Jim Harris did not emerge from the pool-room.

Bareheaded, he crossed the street, breath a trifle short, heart thumping.

THE aimless chatter of the group frazzled to a telltale silence as the editor appeared in their doorway. He stood a moment, counting them. Each township was represented. He stepped inside, drawing the door shut behind him.

"Gentlemen," he said, and bowed.

They were all old men, except Sim.

Wes Hubbard took his feet from the chairman's desk.

"Mornin' Hump," he said and picked up the gavel. "Lookin' for a piece for th' *Banner?*"

There was something malicious in the casual question.

"Yes; for the *Banner*—perhaps."

"Ought to make a good write-up. We're goin' to resolute for a new court-house an' for lots of roads this afternoon."

"That's commendable. We've managed to stagger along with the old tin shack and our sand trails for quite a while. You think, do you, gentlemen, that the electorate will vote the bonds?"

"Sure thing!" It was Sim Burns, rather defensive in his manner. "Why shouldn't they?"

The editor shrugged.

"There's only one thing to stand in the way," he said. "Taxes."

Wes Hubbard rose.

"I guess th' people understand pretty well that th' county's goin' to be better fixed for funds."

"That's why I came over, gentlemen, to ask, as a representative of the press, about the revised assessments."

There was a stir in the group; men drew closer together.

"That'll come out when th' boards of review meet."

"And maybe it'll come out sooner!" There was a snap to the old editor's voice. "I want to know who's going to pay the bill."

Some one coughed. Henry Wales sniffed and eyed his cigar.

"That's all fixed, Hump," Hubbard said, eyes on the other's face. "There won't be any hardship for anybody that ain't got it comin'."

"Let's understand one another, gentlemen. Let's get down to brass tacks. I understand that the valuation on Foraker's Folly is to be raised until the sum realized will pay interest and create sinking funds for all these bonds."

"No more'n fair!" Sim Burns snapped. "No more'n legal! I've only followed the law in makin' my assessment."

The editor's blue eyes whipped to Burns as he asked,

"Only what law?"

"State-tax law"—color mounting, lower lip drooping. "You stood by Foraker; you stood by his girl. You believed they could grow timber out there, an' they have. Now do you want to stand between 'em an' th' bill for that privilege? Want to be a party to defrauding the people of this county out of their just tax income?"

There was menace in Bryant as he stepped forward, fists half clenched.

"You, Burns, and all of you know my attitude on the matter of taxing timber. There's no need of discussing that. I'm here to discuss a matter of justice."

"Justice?" scoffed Sim. "Justice? You think it's fair for a big, rich property like that to get out of paying?"

"I think it is illegal for any large interest to shirk its share of public expense; I think it is criminal for tax officers to aid and abet any interest in avoiding its just burden. That is why I have come—on a matter of justice.

"Understand me, gentlemen; I come not as a trouble-maker, not as a kicker against improvements, but on a simple matter of simple justice. The people of this county understand your plan thoroughly. Foraker's Folly is to pay the bill for these improvements. Chief Pontiac Power and Jim

Harris are to benefit by them directly, and the people are to benefit by boasting a new public building.

"I want to call your attention to this fact: Chief Pontiac Power, all its holdings, its three dams, its three power-plants, its flowage rights, its unused key-position, its monopoly of the power possibilities in this county, its subsidiary, the Harris Development Company, are assessed at a valuation of two hundred thousand."

He paused, and his eyes sought out the face of Art Billings, which had paled suddenly.

"I haven't heard you making a noise about raising the assessment of Chief Pontiac in your township to a cash-value basis, Art."

Silence.

The blue eyes swept the faces again, and the editor's voice rose a bit.

"I haven't heard any of you objecting to the low assessement of this corporation, which, as any of us knows, will run over six million dollars cash value. More, *market* value!

"I've heard a mighty roar against Foraker's Folly; I haven't heard a whisper against Chief Pontiac. I'm not going to discuss this; I'm not going to ask you why." A ripple of relief ran over the group. "I'm going to *tell* you why!"

HIS voice had leaped to a roar, and his hand went quickly to his hip-pocket, bringing forth the worn note-book. The silence was painful as he drew down his spectacles from his forehead and thumbed the pages.

"I have here memoranda which interests me, and will interest you, and will interest perhaps—perhaps the electorate, perhaps the Tax Commission, perhaps the prosecuting attorney of this county if properly urged by the governor of our great state."

He looked into the book.

"I read at random: At the top of the page, I find this date: January 4, 1915. Below is written the name of Oliver Burns, uncle of the present supervisor from Lincoln Township, veteran member of this body until his death. In the next column is written the time, one thirty-two P.M.; which means that at that moment he entered the Commercial House and ascended the stairs of the room of James Harris, local representative of a great corporation." He paused, for his throat had tightened. He looked about almost fearfully, but the amazement is those faces gave him strength.

"I turn the pages. The date is August 9, 1917. The first name is again Oliver Burns; the hour is nine-sixteen A.M., and he went up to the same place, up the same stairs to the same room, still occupied by James Harris, local representative of Chief Pontiac Power.

"The next notation is nine-forty-seven A.M., and the name opposite is Wes Hubbard; the next is twenty minutes to eleven, and the name is Art Billings. The next was Oren Culman at eleven-four, and so on——

"Try another page: March 5, 1918. Art Billings was early, at eight-twenty-two. Until after eleven Mr. Harris had no callers, but he remained in his room waiting, looking through the window now and then. At three minutes past eleven Wes Hubbard went up the stairs, at eleven-twenty-two Oliver Burns, and at one minute to noon Oren Culman——

"And so on, with little change, until May 6, 1920, when a new name appears—that of Sim Burns."

He stopped, jaw trembling.

"You are all there, gentlemen—on every page."

Slowly he closed the book and stood with it between his palms. No word of reply came for an instant, and then Sim Burns spoke.

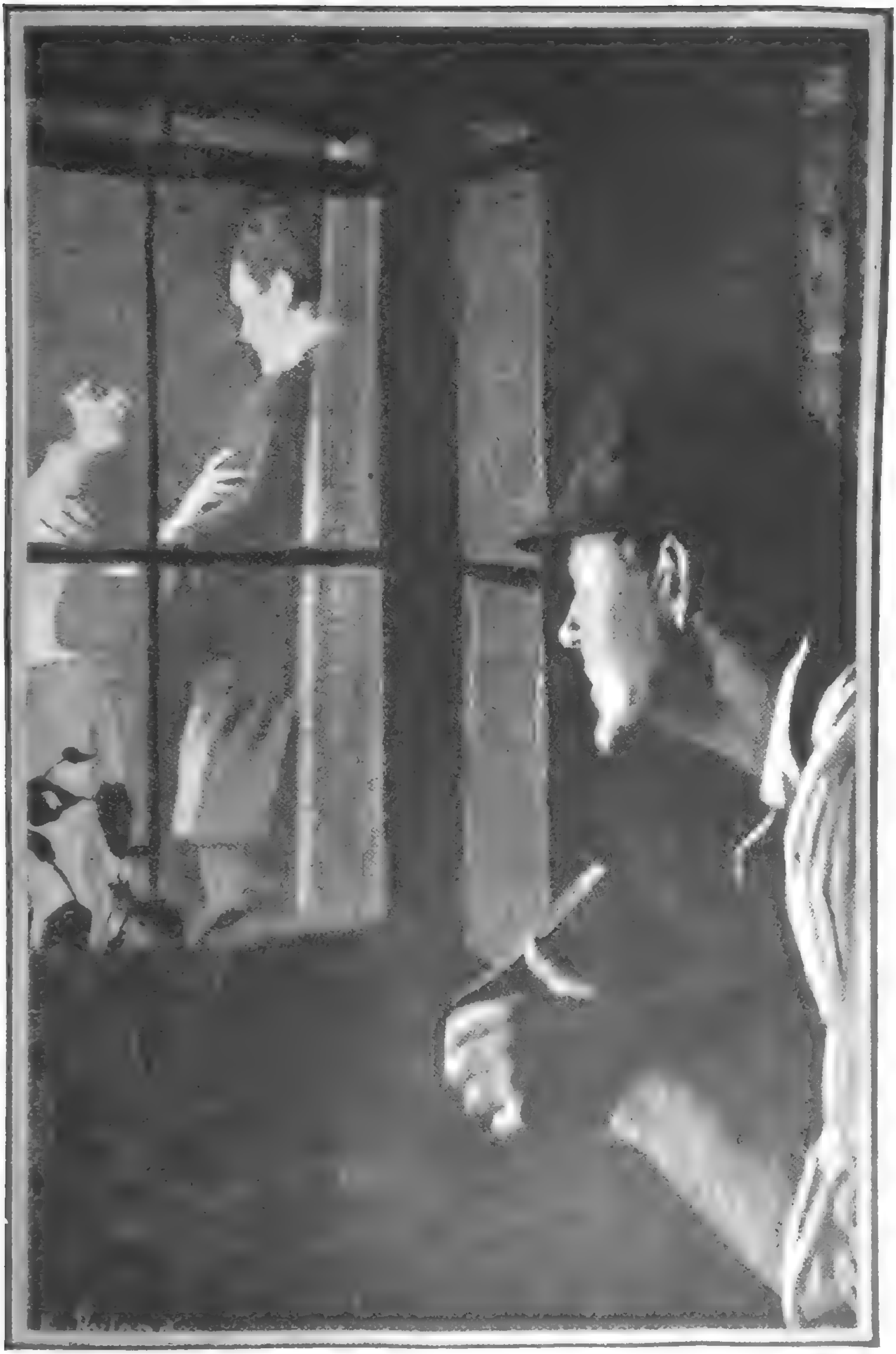
"You've mentioned my uncle's name." His voice was thin. "You'd accuse the dead of takin' Chief Pontiac money? You'd slander the dead?"

The editor's heart pelted at his ribs. He had wrung it from them!

"The dead? Aye, the dead! And the living, equally smirched, will stand for it!" he cried, and his hand clutching the notebook lashed out in a furious gesture as he stepped backward to fling open the door.

"Two columns of these notes I've read, gentlemen. Do you want me to read the third? Do you want me to shout down the halls of this building the exact values of your thirty pieces of silver? The price that Chief Pontiac has paid and you have accepted so the people of this county might be defrauded to help a great corporation?"

A movement, sharp and quick and certain, as Wes Hubbard skipped from the chairman's platform.



In the darkness outside, Milt Goddard, who had spied and seen all, fingered the bit of the ax he had taken from the wood-pile.

"Shut up, Bryant!" he panted.

His voice was husky, and he trembled as he backed against the door to close it.

The old man did not look at him. He pushed his spectacles upward, and his eyes, firm and assured and penetrating, ran from face to face slowly before he turned to look at the chairman, who stood there, pale and shrunken.

"If I don't choose to shut up? What then?"

"I'll—we'll—" stammered Hubbard, floundering for a threat.

"You'll go, every last one of you, to a larger, finer building than this; but it's a tighter building, more imposing than any your bonds would have built; and as for roads—you may build them with your hands, you blackguards!"

The epithet popped from his lips, and he moved forward. This brought him in line with the window, and from the pool-room he saw Jim Harris emerge, hat back, face red with laughter.

"We understand one another," he said, halting. "I came on an errand of justice. I am leaving now. If Chief Pontiac wants to bear its equitable share of taxation for the fruits that it will enjoy, I have no argument. Chief Pontiac Power does not want to be fair, gentlemen. You've put yourself in the hands of rascals. Vote those resolutions this afternoon that mean the ruin of Foraker's Folly, and"—he gave the note-book just the suggestion of a brandish as he replaced it in his pocket—"otherwise, the matter of the value of your pieces of silver—may wait."

He went from the room with no further word, and his feet echoed on the light boards of the stairway as he descended. Until he was gone from the building, no man stirred.

"Here comes Jim!" rasped Art Billings.

"I move we adjourn." This in a whisper from Sim Burns.

"You can't adjourn; we ain't been called to order," mumbled Hubbard.

"To hell with that!" cried Sim. "He's got it on us. Do you all want to rot in jail? Clear out before Harris gets here, or you'll be hoppin' from the frying-pan into the coals!"

They went, with a thundering of feet, down the stairway and scattered in the dusty thoroughfare of Pancake.

Jim Harris stopped and watched them go.

"All through?" he asked Henry Wales.

"Through—er—you see, Jim——"

Briefly and nervously the landlord told his guest the story, and Harris's face darkened. He made no threats then, for he knew that, like mercy, corruption touches him who gives and him who receives. He stood still, gazing blankly at the office of the Blueberry *Banner*. Hump Bryant was at the telephone, tongue roving his lip, eye smiling happily as he listened to the glad response of Helen Foraker.

"How'd it happen?" he asked. "Lord knows! I guess He had a hand in it, my dear."

TAYLOR and Black Joe were back in the forest by late afternoon. Helen was gone.

They went first to the men's shanty, where Joe removed the worn and shabby suit he kept for such a rare event as a trip to Pancake and was struggling into overalls and a work-shirt when John, importuned by Benny to come and fix his seesaw, started toward the big house. Joe paused in his dressing.

"Say." John stopped. Joe cleared his throat. "Tell her," he growled, "that I went to town an' that I'm back."

His voice was gruffer than ever, but John smiled as he walked away. Joe, who would not even speak to Aunty May, sending her this trivial message of his well-being!

He busied himself with the board and horse which made the children's teeter, and saw Aunty May come to the door, mixing-bowl on her hip, and glance at the children briefly—and look long at the men's shanty. Finally, she came outside.

"Helen went to town," she volunteered. "Hump' Bryant telephoned some news that made her glad. She's gone to bring him out for Sunday with the children. They don't see their Grandpa Humpy much." Taylor worked on. "You've been away most all day," she said. He had, he admitted. "Your logs most cut?" They were. "I s'pose you have to go to town a lot now." Yes; he had been in to-day.

She talked with the manner of one whose mind is not just on what she says, and her eyes went from time to time to the men's shanty.

"That's one advantage of bein' an ornery man. You c'n pick up an' git out when you will."

Taylor remonstrated that men, at times, had obligations.

"But when you're free, you gen'ally can find somebody to bum with. Now, a woman, she don't like to go to town alone." And so on, edging close to the question which was uppermost in her mind, inspecting Taylor's work with an interest and concentration that was obviously assumed.

John, watching, finally said:

"We were lucky to-day. Caught the down freight and got a ride back to Seven Mile with Dr. Pelly."

"Oh, so you didn't go alone?"

"No; Joe and I went in."

"An' three of you rode in that one-seated car of the doctor's?"

"Oh, there was plenty of room. Yes; we all came back."

Forthwith she departed for the kitchen with the alacrity of relief, and Taylor chuckled.

Both funny and heart-breaking, it was, as Helen had said. Sour Aunty May, crusty Black Joe—they would not speak, but the first thought of each was for the other's welfare.

Humphrey Bryant came back with Helen that night, and John joined them later on and listened to the old editor's modest recital of what had taken place in the courthouse. He saw the relief in Helen's face, detected the justified pride that the old man took in thwarting Harris's carefully conceived plan. He listened, smiling, on the verge of telling the part he had played and which no one knew but Black Joe—the most important part in that day's victory—when Helen checked her laughter and sighed.

"It's only the skirmish. The real fight is to come."

And then they talked seriously of what awaited their wits and courage. Again Taylor detected that unyielding temper in the girl, stirred against any man or influence that menaced her forest. It was, to-night, as though Jim Harris and the others sought her very life; she planned and talked that tensely.

Ezam Grainger had gone. The new bank cashier—one young Wilcox—had arrived the day before. Ezam's mind had been so taken up with his wife's trouble that he had no time for the troubles of others. He had been sorry, but he could do nothing for Helen now. Surely, he thought, the new man would renew the mortgage; perhaps, later, he might aid himself, if help were still needed.

But that day Helen Foraker's chief ally had defied Pontiac Power, and the corporation would go out of its way not at all to help carry on the dream of eternal pine. Humphrey was going down-state the first of the week to hunt an investor. Outwardly he was optimistic, but he could not cover his misgiving, and when Helen indicated the head-lines in a Detroit paper heralding the sharp credit stringency, his pleasant assurance lost its ring entirely.

SUNDAY. The children, one at either hand, drew Grandpa Humpy away to inspect a nest of hatching chicks, and John, beside Helen, strolled down the river.

Last night he had intended to tell her of his father's plan; he had put it off because of lack of opportunity. This morning the flush of yesterday's victory died before other grave problems. She had troubles enough; to-night he would talk to Rowe. To-morrow would do. And perhaps to-night's interview would yield the hope that this obstacle need not be faced.

There was their moment of love-making when, half reclining on the pine-needles, he held her close to him and felt her hand stroking his head and heard her say that she needed him, that, big as the forest was in her reasons for living, it would be small now without this other thing which had come into her heart.

They went back together, her elbow touching his side. Goddard, on lookout in Watch Pine—for the fair days had dried the country and distant brush fires sent up wraiths of pale smoke—saw them come as he had seen them go. His hand clutched the battered field-glasses, and his knee against the rail of the crow's-nest trembled.

Philip Rowe had arrived that morning, and was in his room at dusk when John's knuckles fell on the door. No words were bandied this time. Taylor came to the point at once.

"Evidently I started the thing that I was trying to make impossible."

Rowe shrugged and smoked deliberately.

"Your father never did fancy long-time investments; and he's a bit touchy on any matter of conservation. It doesn't sound practical to him."

"Did you tell him what I told you about the work that this pine represents, about the fact that a girl has been carrying the load alone?" He put that question sharply.

"I told him everything you said, Taylor"—defensively. "Are you thinking that I deliberately caused trouble between you and your father?"

THERE was bravado in that question, a show of fearless frankness which did not sound real. Quickly Taylor reflected: Rowe had been close to his father, and Marcia Murray more than once had hinted that his own position might be dangerous.

"No; I don't think that yet, Rowe."

"Meaning that you think you *will* think it?"—laughing.

"Perhaps."

Rowe laughed again.

"There's no need of your losing your temper because you made your father lose his," he said. "You've a good opportunity here yet. You and your father don't think alike on a great many things; there's no point on which you could differ any more than on this pine deal.

"No use trying to impress you with his appetite for Michigan pine. You understand that as well as I do. Perhaps there's one thing about him you don't realize, and that is that, when it comes to a deal involving something he wants, he has damned little regard for what other people want.

"He wants this pine. We've looked it over carefully, not only the timber but its backing. That backing is shaky, Taylor. I understand there was a little inside political excitement yesterday and Miss Foraker won. Well, that's only a stop-gap. These fellows have the law with them, and in the end they'll get her.

"There's another thing: The bank holds a mortgage for twenty thousand on a part of that forest, and there's no chance of their renewing it. She can't get the money anywhere else unless she's got better credit than most of us, and the foreclosure will pretty well upset her scheme for logging as you outlined it the other day.

"And there are other things—several—" He paused and eyed his cigar. "You've never liked me very well, Taylor; I've known it. I'm now in a position to make you or break you so far as your future with your father is concerned. I have full authority to act for him on that matter."

He paused to let that sink in.

"I don't want to do anything that's unfair." He eyed the tendril of cigar smoke. Some one entered the next room. Muffled voices, which neither of them heeded. "If you want to come in on this deal with us, see it from your father's way and help—it may do a lot to reestablish you in his favor. Just now you're not worth a white chip. He has pretty good reason to believe, too, that you're somewhat prejudiced by your interest in Miss Foraker."

His manner was stinging, and John rose.

"We'll leave Miss Foraker out of this!"

Rowe's brows lifted. The voices in the next room broke off.

"What influence she has had on me is none of your affair and none of my father's. We're talking a timber deal, not something personal. The girl concerns me alone. It was my idea and I'm going to insist on having things my way if I go in at all. I came up here; I saw the timber and its possibilities. Why, there's money in it, Rowe, lots of money for my father and for me! If Miss Foraker weren't pressed for money, we'd never get in on this at all.

"The timber's there; you can't get away from that. She's grown it almost to saw-log size, done it alone, and she's reached the end of her rope. Look at the thing from my point of view. Get behind me with my father's money, and I'll stake everything I hold dear on the bet that we'll clean up."

He stopped, rather breathless. Rowe cleared his throat. From the other room, the sound of footsteps, a closing door. Men went down the hall.

"And suppose I tell you I'm not interested in seeing it your way any more than your father is?" Rowe said.

"Then it will be up to me to fight you both! I've made my choice—I'll stand by this forest."

A gleam of triumph swept Rowe's face.

"You mean that?"

"You heard me."

"And you want me to tell your father this?"

Color flooded Taylor's face.

"Tell him just that," he muttered.

The other rose and put down his cigar.

"It will interest him," he said ironically.

"It will interest him more than anything has since you first mentioned this timber. I"—his eyes ran over Taylor's face craftily "—I will go back to-night with your message."

They stood silent a moment.

"Then we understand each other," said Taylor, and, with no more, took his hat and walked out.

He went down the stairs, down the steps and along the walk. He did not notice the two figures on the hotel veranda—two men who stopped talking when he came out and watched him go.

In his room, Phil Rowe lighted a fresh cigar.

"That makes it very simple." He laughed nervously. "John Taylor—as an heir, you're a washout! And as for this other, I'll strike so quick you won't get your breath!"

ON THE veranda, Milt Goddard leaned closer to Jim Harris.

"I knew it all along," he said thickly, watching Taylor walk away. "I knew he wasn't on the level."

"'Course it's none of my business, Milt, but I never like to see a square girl get taken in. Miss Foraker don't like me, thinks I don't like her, but maybe she'll wake up and find out who her friends are—some day." Harris sighed in satisfaction and half closed his eyes, and hardly heard Goddard's heavy threats against Taylor.

All the night before Harris had lain awake, trying to determine just what had struck his plan yesterday to knock it into a cocked hat. Humphrey Bryant had been the agency—yes; but there was something, he felt, beneath the surface.

His day had been replete with serious conversations. First had been one with Rowe, in which names and figures and detail were discussed. Then he had summoned the boy Lucius and talked gravely to him—so gravely and earnestly that the lad's eyes bulged and, when he left Jim's room, he walked with the bearing of one who is excited by great responsibility. And then he talked with Henry Wales, his good nature giving way to hardness. Sim Burns came to see him and they were locked up for an hour.

These conferences were followed by a gossipy journey up and down the street ending in the pool-room, where the proprietor laughed with him over Black Joe's Bunion story, but in the midst of the laugh Harris sobered and smoked a moment and asked questions about Black Joe's coming, about young Taylor; and when he learned that they had asked about his cigars and his habits, the proprietor said:

"That Taylor's a funny cuss, ain't he? Yesterday he seemed more interested in the clock than he did in what Joe had to say."

"Yes; he— Huh? The clock!" Harris stared blankly at the other a moment.

"By the way, Jim, what's this story about the Foraker girl gettin' Hump to sit on the road and court-house plans?"

"All rot! There's a kink in the tax law they brought up," he lied, "and they're tryin' to dodge taxes, but they'll never get away with it."

"Dirty work, eh? Is that so? Always knew Hump was a nut, but never s'posed he was crooked."

"No; none of you ever did. He makes a dog's hind leg look like a straight line. But wait—you wait. Somethin's goin' to drop!"

Shortly thereafter, he walked out, and as he passed the *Banner* office, he looked malevolently at the litter behind the dusty windows.

"You're one, Hump Bryant—and young Taylor makes two. I'll get you—as sure as water runs down-hill!"

It was dusk when John and Bryant and Goddard drove into town. Harris watched them from the hotel veranda, studying Milt's sullen manner toward young Taylor. He knew men and motives, did Harris. Little of the bearing of men toward men escaped him, because frictions were the material with which he could always work.

Taylor went into the hotel, and Goddard came to sit beside Harris. Later, they went up-stairs, for Harris had something important to say to the big woodsman. He did not need to say it, however. The long arm of coincidence reached out that evening and drew four men together, and through the thin partition Milt Goddard heard the things from Taylor's own lips that Harris had wanted to tell him. After that, they went down to the veranda and smoked again—and the work was done.

Two long-distance calls went out of Pancake that evening—one to Luke Taylor and the other to Marcia Murray at

Windigo Lodge, and after that Rowe went to drive with Harris. While they rolled slowly down the river road, Rowe listened, rather startled at times, but always reassured by what his companion had to say.

"I'd figured I might have trouble with Milt, but it was as easy as kissin' a pretty girl. For years he's been sweet on her; he's been green-eyed ever since Taylor got the inside track.

"S'help me, I didn't know you and Taylor were up-stairs. But Goddard stood in my room and heard with his own ears the young cub beg you for help—and it sounded just like he wanted to cut that pine himself, the way he put it. Better than any lie *I* could 've thought up!"

"But won't Goddard blow to Miss Foraker?" Rowe asked.

"Well, maybe Taylor will himself. But there's a bigger chance that Goddard suspects Taylor is on his dad's side, and if we can get 'em fightin' among themselves, it'll be all down hill and shady. The iron is hot, my friend. Better grab your hammer!"

"He thinks I'm going back to Detroit tonight. But there'll be no grass under my feet. I'll talk to her before the dew's dry in the morning."

PHILIP ROWE'S interview with Helen may be divided into two parts. The first is unimportant to this narrative. Keenly planned, adroitly maneuvered, he brought the talk up to the point of values and put his request for an option. But the man had roused the girl's distrust from the beginning.

"The forest isn't for sale," she said simply.

"So we have understood. But circumstances, I thought, might change your mind. We have all respect for your ability, but we realize that the load is becoming too much for you to carry."

"You know a great deal about my—troubles," she said evenly.

"Business men no longer do business in the dark, Miss Foraker."

"But when I tell you that the property isn't for sale——"

"It is unconvincing."

Beneath his suavity was something terrible, hard and brutal; he no longer smiled, but leaned forward intently.

"You're a young woman, standing alone under a terrible burden. You have proven your point—that timber can be grown as a crop. That should satisfy you, and you should let go. Your whole life is before you. It isn't proper that you should slave on here, headed straight for ruin.

"Besides"—dryly—"a man of powerful interests wants what you have created, is willing to pay you a good price, but he *wants* it. That is what counts with him; that is what should count with you, if you are—wise."

He lowered his voice on the last word, and in its flatness was a suggested threat.

"I am sorry to disappoint him."

"He does not know what disappointment is." When her eyes widened at his statement, he smiled for the first time. "He knows only triumph. He knows only how to win."

Her color mounted.

"Are you threatening me?"

He spread his hands in a gesture of humility.

"Only trying to aid you. Asking you to name your figure."

"And threatening me if I refuse?"

Her voice was sharp and brittle and brought slow color to Rowe's face.

"You are too hasty, Miss Foraker."

"Too tardy, I should say. I don't care to sell, Mr. Rowe, and I have work to do."

She rose. The man leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"You have the courage to refuse a man who has all he wants but happiness, and sees happiness in the possession of your forest?"

"I have not the courage to give you what you want."

He looked narrowly at her then. She was beyond his experience.

"I don't wholly understand you," he said, as though that did not matter, or as though it might flatter her, "and perhaps you don't understand me quite thoroughly. There are other factors involved. You've been doing a courageous but unwise thing by meddling in politics."

"Politics?"

"The story is coming out about Saturday's affair in the court-house. Oh, yes; I know about that, too. Strangely, people throughout the county do not seem to think, as you think, that their supervisors are all scoundrels. They believe that there was black work from the other side—from you, Miss Foraker. They believe they have lost their chance at improvements through the efforts of Senator Bryant on your behalf. Their temper is not pleasant."

Helen smiled.

"My work is still waiting. All this is interesting, but there's no use talking any more, I'm sure."

She moved toward the door with a poise and finality that sent a wave of anger through Rowe.

"Miss Foraker——"

"Please! Please don't try to talk or argue. I don't like your half-threats, Mr. Rowe. You don't frighten me—but it is unpleasant. As for your coming here, I have told you that it is useless. I will not sell."

There was challenge in her gesture as she opened the screen door. He could not know that her legs were unsteady, her heart racing. He did not think of that, was conscious only of having been worsted.

He moved toward the step, hat in his hand, and stood beside her.

"I will leave you now," he said. "But I am coming again. Had your work been a little less—er—pressing, I might have told you more of what you face; but you're not interested, anyhow, even though your back is to the wall."

He went out and did not look back.

The girl moved to the center of the room and stood there, hands at her sides, shoulders a bit slack, looking up at her father's picture above the bowl of wild roses on the mantel.

"Father"—weakly—"father, I'm frightened! And he said I couldn't keep on and almost makes me—believe it!"

MILT GODDARD saw Philip Rowe's departure.

He stepped out of the road to let his car pass and remained beside the ruts, watching until it was out of sight.

Rowe could have come from but one place by that road, and he hastened on to the big house under Watch Pine. At the door he paused a moment, irresolute, but when he stepped in to see Helen at her desk, his indecision departed. Her head was bowed, arms about it, and he saw her shudder. For the space of a dozen breaths he stood looking at the girl, sensing her trouble, but in his face appeared no sympathy—only joy.

"Helen! What is it?"

He stepped forward as she sat erect and rose to walk toward the mantel.

"Nothing," she replied.

He was beside her.

"Don't put me off," he said, with the manner of one who is very certain of himself. "You've got to listen now. Maybe if you'd listened when I tried to give you warnin', you wouldn't have been so upset."

His assurance, his evident knowledge of what had happened startled her.

"Warning? What do you mean? Do you know what has happened?"

"I don't know, but I can make a good guess; and to make a good guess a man has to know *some*thing!"

"You talked to—that man?"

"To Rowe?" He shook his head. "I've never spoken a word to him, but I know what he was here for." His mouth twisted in a half-smile of triumph. The girl stood staring at him while voices came to them from the river, a sharp command, excited response, as the last of the hardwood logs swung round the bend. "He come to buy you out, didn't he?"

"Yes. I refused, of course, and he went away making threats. He knows all about us, Milt."

"He knows all about us!" he echoed, and laughed briefly. "And that's what I tried to tell you once and you wouldn't listen."

She caught her breath.

"I don't understand you——"

Until then he had been tense, almost belligerent; but with her last words he relaxed and looked away, because he did not want her to detect his gladness. She was begging him now to reveal what he knew, and the groundless warning which he had given weeks ago loomed large and real; Taylor was a traitor in her camp, and he could prove it. With Taylor gone, with his own sagacity proven— It was a sweet moment for Milt Goddard.

The averting of his face set his eyes toward the river. Taylor and two others worked to free a raft from the bend in which it had lodged. He saw John's lithe body put its strength on his pike-pole, saw the logs sink beneath him as he shoved.

"Once you told me that I was your good friend," he began. "You still think that; don't you, Helen?"

"Of course, Milt."

"It's the place of a man to look out for his friends, I take it. I've tried to look out for you, but you couldn't see it that way. You thought it was another thing."

His thumbs were hooked in his belt and he stood very close to her.

"I have worked for you, Helen, I've fought for you once or twice when it's been necessary. I've took all the interest any man could take in this forest when it's stood between you—and me. I told you once that sometimes I hated it. That's right. I do—sometimes. But I've kept on doin' my best for it, because you're right when you say it's your life. Anything that might harm this timber would be like somebody layin' hands on you, and that's why I can stand it.

"If I've done that, ain't it right for you to expect that whatever I do is for your good? Ain't it reasonable for me to think that you'd—trust me?"

"I do trust you. I always——"

"Not always," he interrupted, voice rising slightly. "I tried to warn you once, but you put me off. It's been hard enough to keep still and wait for proof when I knew the Folly was in danger, but that wasn't nothin' compared to how hard it was to keep quiet when I knew—after I saw him kiss you."

One of the girl's hands went quickly to her bosom and lay there, fingers outspread. Goddard's face darkened.

"I did see that"—voice trembling. "I looked through that window and saw it. I saw him hold you in his arms and saw him kiss you, and you—you didn't drive him off as you would any other man who come to strike at this pine, which is your life."

"At the pine! Milt——"

Her hand dropped to his arm and gripped the great muscles.

"You told me you didn't have time to love because this forest was your life. You've been fooled, Helen, fooled by a slick tongue and—and—you've been blind to what's goin' on. You've not only risked losin' what you call your life, but you've risked breakin' your heart!

"I can't talk the way he can, but I can't lie the way he can. I can't lie with words; I can't live a lie. Oh, I knew! I knew from the beginnin'! I couldn't be quite sure then, and you wouldn't believe me. But I am sure now! I could tell you the whole story. I could tell you what Taylor meant when he kissed you; I could tell you about this man, Rowe, but I won't. Ask *him!*" He flung out an arm toward Taylor in the river. The girl held her eyes on his and her lips moved, but no sound came from them. "Bring him here," the woodsman said heavily, "and I'll *make* him tell you!"

For a moment she stared into his face.

"You want me to bring—John Taylor here—to tell me——"

Wretched suspicion ran through her. She was helpless to do else than yield to that suspicion before this man, who was so certain, so convincing.

"Yes—now!"

SHE went down the steps, crossed the plat of dried sod. Her legs were not steady; the one hand was again at her breast. She did not move along consciously; it was as though the will of the woodsman prompted every minute movement of her body.

She reached the path beside the riverbank and faltered and went on. Taylor, moving back to the high-riding hemlock log in the center of the freed raft, looked up. He waved and smiled—and then stopped still, for even at that distance her weakness was evident.

The hand which had been at her bosom rose slowly and beckoned.

"You want me?" he called.

She tried to speak, but could not—merely nodded and beckoned again.

He spoke to the men with him and, as the raft gained way, planted his pike on bottom and vaulted across the strip of water.

She had stopped, the wind whipping her skirt about her legs, making her body appear to sway like an unstable stalk.

"Helen, what is it?"—for he saw her blanched face and parted lips.

"Come," she said hoarsely, and turned while he was yet yards away and started back toward her house.

"Tell me," he demanded, taking her arm as he came up with her.

She drew her elbow away from his grasp and looked at him as one who, even in half-consciousness, shrinks from the undesirable.

"Helen——"

They were at the steps. Goddard, glowering at Taylor, held back the screen door, and John followed the girl into the room. There they stood, Helen backed against the mantel, beneath the bowl of roses and her father's photograph. Taylor looked from her to Goddard and caught the vengeful light in the man's gray eyes.

"What's the trouble?" he asked evenly, some deep-set impulse rising to steel him for a crisis.

Goddard spoke.

"There's been a good deal goin' on lately to cause suspicion. Some of us have had our eyes and ears open." He could not help grilling Helen for the pain she had caused him. "Now it's come to a showdown, Taylor, and we want to ask you a few questions."

His manner was galling; resentment rose with a flush to Taylor's face, and behind that came fear. But he said, outwardly at ease,

"Fire away."

GODDARD looked at Helen, who had not moved. Her bosom rose and fell quickly and she was chalk white.

"In the first place, you know this man Rowe, an' there's no use denyin' it."

"I hadn't thought of denying it," he said, and looked to Helen as though for an explanation of this performance. He saw in her face fright—and a growing something. *Suspicion?*

"I thought so," jeered Goddard. "Now, will you tell us what his job is?"

"He is my father's private secretary."

He saw the girl start sharply, heard an inarticulate whisper from her, saw Milt settle himself on one foot and smile grimly and nod.

"Yea. Workin' for Luke Taylor. He come up here for Luke Taylor, didn't he? He was here just now on your father's business, wasn't he?"

Rowe here! He had lied, then; he had not gone back to Detroit last night; the days of grace which John expected had not materialized. He had been tricked, outguessed. It confused him.

"Look here, Goddard—Helen! This is something I've feared for a long time. I've been trying to work it out for weeks, and I've kept still because you had enough to think about. I can explain if——"

"That's what we want, Taylor, is for you to explain. We know the rest—that you've known about this all along."

The man's bitterness was a trap closing about him. It was bewildering, terrible—it and his sense of guilt. He was in a corner, hedged in by mounting suspicion.

"Helen, this isn't fair!"

His voice sounded strained. His one hand, uplifted, seemed unconvincing, only a gesture of supplication, a plea for mercy.

Helen detected that, saw his confusion, contrasted with the certain strength of Goddard, and color flooded back into her face. The suspicion that had been in her eyes gave way to something else, to actual hostility. This man also was of that group for which she had no charity.

Taylor read that. His heart faltered and the hand sank slowly, but, as it went down, something rose within him—pride. He had been dismayed, shaken, frightened—terror-stricken by the fact that she suspected him of— Ah, he knew what suspicions his indecision could nourish! And now this other thing surged up—this pride, which would not let him beg. They had snatched at conclusions; he had made his mistake, but they would not give him opportunity to clear himself. She would not believe him innocent of wrong intent; she would not trust him——

"Yes; I will tell you why he is here," he said quietly. "My father sent him here to try to buy this forest."

"And how'd he happen to come?" Goddard advanced closer with his question. "Did you send for him?"

"I did not send for him."

"Sure of that? You had nothin' to do with his comin' here?"

"I—I had everything to do with it. I told my father about this timber, but I did not ask either of them to come here."

He knew that his answer sounded like an evasion even before Goddard turned to nod at the girl.

"You're wrong!" Taylor cried out, moving forward impetuously, looking from one to the other. "You're all wrong! You're misjudging me; you're not giving me a chance——"

Something like hope, he thought, leaped into the girl's face, but Goddard interrupted, thundering:

"Chance? What chance did you give Helen here?"

"Every ch——"

"No chance at all! You brought Rowe

here; you let him bring in his cruiser and go over the place and you covered it up. You let him go to Detroit and talk it over with your father. You waited for him to get back yesterday with his answer. You——"

"You're wrong, I tell you!"

"Shut up!" Drunk with the sense of dominion, Goddard brooked no interruption. "You went to Pancake yesterday. You knew Rowe was there. You went to his room in the hotel and talked with him.

"You want your own way in this deal; you told him that and I heard you. You ain't fooled me; I've watched every crooked move you've made. 'There's money in it,' you said, 'lots of money for my father and for me. If Miss Foraker weren't pressed for money, we'd never get in on this at all.'

"You said that, Taylor, and you said you wanted this as much as your father ever wanted to cut pine in his life. You begged Rowe to help you out. Begged him to get behind you with your father's money.

"And you argued him over. He was here to-day to buy, and he knows the mess Helen's in—because you told him, because you told the things she told you, you snake!"

He *had* said those things. His own words, repeated by Goddard, pelted in on his consciousness, battering down the strength that had prompted him to admit everything before coming out with the explanation; his words confused and rendered him helpless. Again he turned to the girl.

"Helen, do you believe——"

But his golden moment had passed. The pride which had held him quiet to take punishment and emerge with an explanation and clean hands had robbed him of the opportunity to clear himself. He had stood quiet; he had made no denial, and now, as he looked at the girl, he saw only the tight set of her mouth, the barrier of her searching stare. She would not speak. She damned him with her silence. She had whispered love to him, but in this moment she had no faith! Love? *That* was no love!

He could not know that, beneath that front, Helen's heart was breaking. She felt lost, like a little girl who is lost. She had given her trust, her lips to this man; she had challenged Goddard when he warned against him, but Goddard had been right. John Taylor had not been worthy of her trust, let alone her caresses. Else why that silence? Why had he admitted the black charges? He had betrayed her while he made love! Oh, she was sick and weak and faint, but her high temper was up. Her forest was her life. To-day John Taylor, through Phil Rowe, had struck at her life. There could be no answer to that.

She moved to her desk and sat down, trying to still the flutter of her heart, the tremor of her hands, fighting back the blackness that seeped up to clutch her consciousness.

"The last of your logs will be at the mill to-night," she said. "Here is last week's statement. We will be finished with your cut within a week."

This was dismissal, and he rocked under the blow of her decisiveness.

"Yes—finished. And I will be going now."

HE TURNED and brushed past Goddard, leaving the house, going to his bunk. He packed his suitcase with cold hands, a fog before his eyes, rage with the pain in his heart. She had no trust for him; she would not listen!

And remorse! For he had shrunk from facing this situation before, when there was time to explain, when he might have been believed.

Until Taylor had disappeared within the men's shanty, Milt Goddard stood watching him. Then he turned. Helen sat at her desk, hands gripping the chair-arms for a frantic hold on reality. He moved to her and put his big palms on the desk.

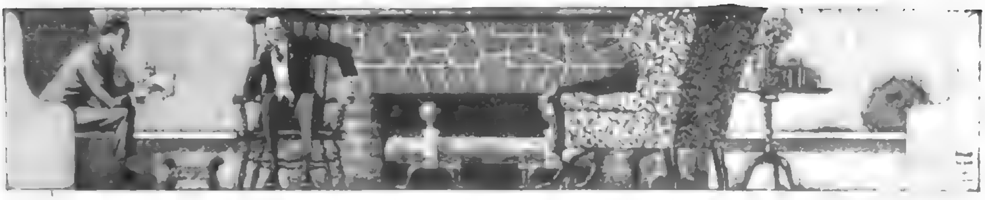
"I warned you," he said thickly. "I was right, wasn't I? And now I guess you know which man it is that——"

"Don't you say that word!" she cried hoarsely, springing up. "Don't you say it to me, Milt Goddard! Ever! Nor any man! *Any* man——"

She drew the back of one hand hard across her mouth as though she would wipe from it the memory of Taylor's kisses. She started to speak, but breath caught in her throat.

"Ever!" she cried again chokingly, and turned and fled.

Luke Tayler is coming himself to Foraker's Folly. What will be the fate of Helen's cherished pine forest? See the concluding instalment in March EVERYBODY'S—out February 15th.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

TWO gentlemen, who characterize the department as "unspeakable, unbearable and almost unbelievable," request the privilege of either buying flowers to send to Mr. Gridley Adams' funeral or contributing to a pension fund to permit him to discontinue "Prose and Worse." The proposal was put to Mr. Adams by wire, and he replied instantly by *wireless:*

> Prefer flowers because of uncertainty of pensions. Accept by all means with privilege of returning courtesy, because I may arrange that certain other funerals precede mine. Seeing monkey-gland doctor immediately. Have never yet won a bet. GRID.

AND there are some other gentlemen, and ladies, too, who, although not offering to buy flowers or contribute to pension funds, make some awesome predictions about the new EVERYBODY'S. They think that when we changed our "parcel" to a size more easily handled, our type to a size more easily read, and our contents entirely to fiction, we made a mistake. We have now gone far enough with the new project to have what we think is convincing evidence that we have made no mistake—that is, if we leave the verdict to the public, and we do. We printed in July, the first issue of the new form, 319,289 copies. By January we had grown until we had to print 362,000, an increase of 42,711.

NOW we are going to tell you some of the things being said about us, the good along with the bad, because we believe in contrast.

OHIO: I do not care for the magazine any longer Its contents is almost entirely what seems to me to be a cheap class of fiction. PENNSYLVANIA: I never was so disappointed in a magazine in my life. Cheap fiction from cover to cover. NEW JERSEY: It is not *distingué;* it lacks chic-ness. It is *déclassé.* WASHINGTON: Not a patch on the old magazine.

Listen to the counter-battery:

OREGON: Recently I have fallen in love with it (EVERYBODY'S) all over again. There was one number, September, which simply couldn't be improved. My sons, young men, quite agree with me. NEW ZEALAND: Delighted to see you returning to the standard size. While others decline, EVERYBODY'S renews its youth, like the eagle. NEW YORK: Your magazine is the only one of the half-dozen for which we subscribe which we all read from cover to cover. LONG ISLAND: The October number is distinguished from the cover, which, by the way, is beautiful, to the very last line of reading-matter. NEW YORK: After reading "The Urge," I feel constrained to express my appreciation of Maryland Allen's artistry and your perspicacity in accepting it. KENTUCKY: This is to say that "Shagan" is one of the greatest stories I have ever read. AUSTRALIA: I purchased the August issue of EVERYBODY'S—the price is hot—two shillings and three pence—but never mind; it's good and wholesome reading. VERMONT: Let me congratulate you on restoring EVERYBODY'S to its old convenient size. HONOLULU: EVERYBODY'S should be in every home. NEW JERSEY: Congratulations on a magazine with a character all its own.

AN OHIO lady doesn't want the magazine any more because it is all fiction. She is fair enough to admit that she simply wants something else and wishes us well in our new policy. An Illinois lady quits because she thinks the old magazine was aristocratic, while the present one is melodramatic.

The counter-battery again:

You're doing a beautiful job and I want to shake hands with you on it. . . . Am sure I would want to read EVERYBODY'S even if I weren't specially interested; it's snappy and alive. I am confident it's going to be a big success. . . . Just a line to tell you that I think you have already done wonders to EVERYBODY'S. . . . You have asked for opinions on your change of dress, etc. It is fine, and I shall go back now to reading it. Can't stand such big magazines and such skipping about. The stories are excellent. . . . The "Red House Murder" is about the best yarn I ever read.

RECENTLY there appeared here a sketch of Leonard Hatch in which he said, "American advertising is rarely as dull as American fiction frequently is." To which another of the Chimney Corner family retorts:

When I read this I couldn't help saying: "No! It doesn't even have to have verisimilitude, much less attempt to tell the truth. Why should it be dull? It's purely imaginative."

A little too sweeping. Working along the same lines, a whole nation might be condemned because it produced a few Benedict Arnolds. But here comes George Allan England, who introduces himself preliminary to the appearance of his story, "Sauce," next month, by saying that after college he began writing ads, which developed a sense of imagination; then came a "natural step from life-insurance advertising to pure fiction."

He continues:

Since then have written, sold innumerable stories, poems, essays, etc., also twenty-five novels. Nebraskan by birth, Philistine by choice, traveler as prime diversion. Many countries, mostly on foot. Never caged in city for long. Turn out about five hundred thousand words a year; sell all. Aspirations: To write less, later, and polish more; to see Universal Disarmament. If any message at all for EVERYBODY'S readers, it is: "Stop the United States from spending 92.8 per cent. of the national income for cannons."

IN A previous number we read to the Chimney Corner a letter from a reader who called upon us to stop swearing and smoking (among women), and to see that they were more fully clothed. Our report is that we have not been able to do anything about it, probably because so many other more interesting jobs have been put up to us.

Here's one:

In traveling through the country I am surprised at the great number of open wells and wells with only a trap-door or loose cover, which are a constant source of great danger to the lives of the children on these farms and villages. As I believe that this is partly due to thoughtlessness on the part of these farmers, would it not be well for you to publish a warning in your paper occasionally against this dangerous condition, as many children lose their lives from this cause? Please give this matter your thoughtful consideration.

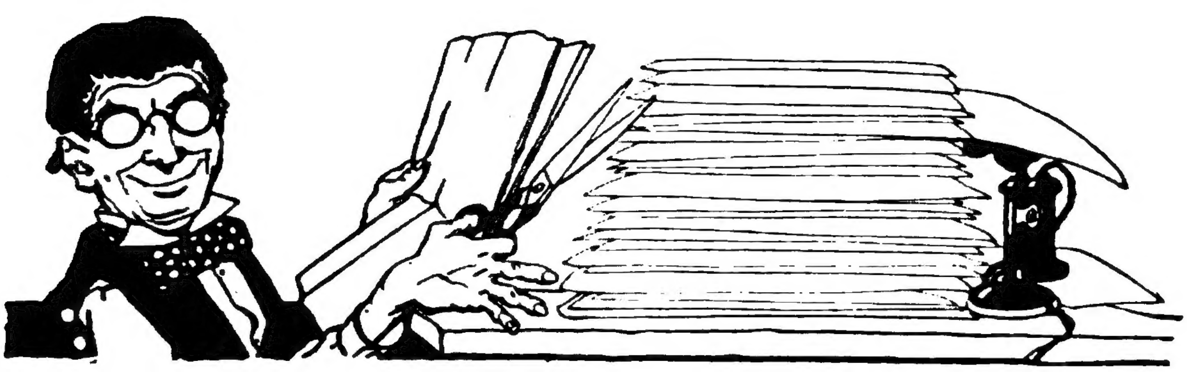
THERE appeared a while ago an unusual short story, "Slave of the Pit," by Bertram Atkey. And next month he will have another, "Even That Which He Hath."

Mr. Atkey tells us that he has been a surveyor, a real-estate agent, and that he also tried brick-making, commerce in gravel for the highways and sand for the diligent builder. For the glory of the greenhouse he produced also flower-pots. But to Atkey neither the mathematical mold of the brickmaker, the spinning of the potter's wheel, nor the heavy labor of the kiln-burner brought fortune, though they gave him a certain local color—as in "Slave of the Pit." Through all these industrial vicissitudes the spare-time writing continued grimly, suffering no abatement. Then he went to the city, there to acquire painfully fresh experiences, as, variously, clerk, canvasser, comedian, advertisement writer, agent, trade-journalist, reporter, sporting writer, assistant editor and editor. At last he chose writing. He is in the first flight of English short-story writers. With one of his popular characters in an English magazine he has set up something of a record. He has written for this magazine about ninety stories of seven thousand words, each round the same character—an easy-going, good-natured adventurer—and is still writing them.

HERE is something that will interest Walter De Leon as well as his many readers:

I was sick last night and could not sleep. In order to do something to pass away the long, dreary hours, I switched the light on and picked up EVERYBODY'S for July and decided to read the first story I would run across. It was "Brooders," by Walter De Leon. Well, I don't know if I can make it strong enough. The best doctor on earth couldn't have done me half as much good. I enjoyed that story so much and had to laugh so heartily that my illness disappeared. This morning I just had to sit down and thank you and Mr. De Leon by writing these few lines.

There will be another story by Mr. De Leon, "Short Vamps," in the March number. SEWELL HAGGARD.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Darby, Pa.: "*Green Coal.*" (How would you like to start a fire with that on a frosty mornin'?)

In Chicago: "*Kuhl & Bent.*"

In Martinsville, Ind.: "*Shoes Repaired While You Wait. Alya Rush.*"

City Physician at Parker, S. D.: "*Dr. Charles Bury.*"

At Cuckoo, Va.: "*Rev. Dr. Eagle.*"

President of National Ex-Service Men's Relief: "*Adam B. Gorry.*"

At Waukegan, Ill.: "*Love Insurance Agency.*"

In Weehawken, N. J.: "*Dr. Hotwet.*" (Specialist in poultices, probably.)

In New York: "*Azif Bros.*" (Merchants, as 'twere.)

Prize clerk in dept. store on Broadway: "*Markem Lowe.*" And in Bonhom, Mexico: "*Liberty Belle.*"

At an English crossroads: "*If you can't read, ask the blacksmith opposite, and he will direct you on your way.*"

In Spooner, Wis.: "$5 *fine for throughing papers or refuges on the sidewalk.*"

Garage-owners in Boxwood, Ind.: "*Gass & Tyer.*"

(*Chicago Daily News*)

Nine out of ten of the magazine articles on how to choose a husband or how to manage one are written by spinsters.

Right-o! The married ones gave it up long ago.

(*Kenosha, Wis., News*)

Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Welles and Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter were in the section of the grand stand at the Elgin races which fell Saturday. Unfortunately all escaped without serious injury.

Yes; this is the *News* office. . . . No; it's very uncertain whether the editor will ever come back.

(*Delavan, Ill., Times*)

To Mr. and Mrs. John Janssen, an eleven-pound boy, Friday evening at their farm home west of town. Mother and child are getting along nicely. This is the third child, the other two being also boys.

I've got one of those "also" boys, too.

(*Neenah, Wis., News*)

Wanted—Experienced vamper. Apply at, etc.

Come to Chicago and bring a net.

(*Cleveland Press*)

An Eastern organization is planning a campaign to have the Constitution of the United States studied in public schools.

While they're at it, they should try also to have it introduced in Congress.

(*South Bend, Ind., News*)

James Houston is suffering from a broken rib and a few bruises caused by a circumstance which occurred in his cow-stable.

Thereby ends the tale.

(*Independence, Kan., Reporter*)

The young couple were the recipients of many beautiful gifts. At eleven o'clock they started for their home in Independence, which had been previously prepared with the best wishes of their friends and a shower of old shoes. (Mrs. J. S.)

Here, dearie; I think this boot will be softer under your head; there—under your head—there——

(*In Chicago Tribune*)

Dog Lost—Name. Buster; All white, black ears. 1 black eye. Columbus, 5889.

Will probably have two by the time he's found.

Copyright, 1922, by Gridley Adams.

(Waterloo Reporter)

Switchman Ivy received news this morning that his father was seriously ill and to come at once. It was not learned where his father was, but he left for there this morning. (H. S. J.)

On his way, at least.

(In a Boston paper)

WANTED—Salesmen to sell Ford cars in Boston and vicinity; automobile experience not necessary. 1019 Commonwealth av. (MRS. E. E.)

The Matterhorn of Candor.

(Letter of V. P., of Hartford Life Ins. Co.)

Clauses in this policy make it adjustable to the unforeseen developments of the future.

Boy, run out and buy me a ouija-board—quick!

(In Farm Loans and City Bonds)

Guilt-Edge Southern Farms. (R. M'B.)

I came near buying one of that kind.

(Spokane Chronicle)

Mrs. Charles Johnson, who was seriously injured two weeks ago by a vicious ram, is so far recivered that she is able to sit in a chair. (C. D. M.)

Now we can put the things back on the mantelpiece

(Fulton, Ill., Journal)

Carl Ware recently bought of Champlin Bros., in Clinton, a splendid span of Belgian draft-horses. The team lacked 500 pounds of weighing 3600 pounds.

Boy, bring me a pencil and paper.

(Lincoln, Neb., State Journal)

NOT AN OUTCRY FROM HEN-HOUSE ON FARM NEAR SYRACUSE AT TIME OF A BIG RAID

Constable Bell, of Syracuse, Neb., reported to lay enforcement headquarters Thursday morning that a farm hen-house near that place was robbed of 200 chicks during Wednesday night. Not an outcry was heard from the hennery. There are several dogs on the farm, but not a peep came from them. In spite of a thorough search, the authorities failed to find the print of a human foot. A search of the roadway failed to reveal evidence that a car or other vehicle had come and gone in the night. There was no impression in the soft ground near the chicken-house. Scientists have discovered that chickens may be stolen with little or no commotion. The individual chicken is turned round and round until he becomes dizzy. Then his head is tucked under his wing, and it is said that he will stay dead for a day or more. But the treatment cannot be given 200 chickens at one time. (R. B. W.)

Whadderyermean, "lay headquarters"?

(From classified advertising)

Linotype machinist operator, speedy, reliable; don't drink; can start at once.

Aw, what's the use NOW?

(New York Evening Mail)

SHOULD THE MAN PROVIDE UP-KEEP OF WRIST-WATCH HE GIVES GIRL?

Sure, if she'll up-keep the wrist.

(Rochester Democrat and Chronicle)

LOST—Will the person who took umbrella at Hotel Seneca Wednesday evening call Ghase, 2287 and receive reward. (L. M.)

Well, I have several I'd reward some one to lug away.

(Evansville Courier)

His automobile carried 45 gallons of whisky and a cartoon of beer.

Draw one.

(Chicago Tribune)

Situation wanted as housekeeper for bachelor or gentleman, experienced.

There's a distinction for you.

(Chicago Tribune)

FOR SALE—30 ice-cream horses.

Yes; but where can I buy the animal-crackers to go with 'em?

(Chicago Tribune)

A uniform will admit the wearer as long as the seats hold out.

Probably good on both patchinger and freight trains.

(Chicago Journal)

Claims to have discovered a weed that will cure the tobacco habit.

Oh, try any 5-cent cigar.

"Of all sad words—"

St. Paul train killed four heifers on Louis Bierte one day last week.

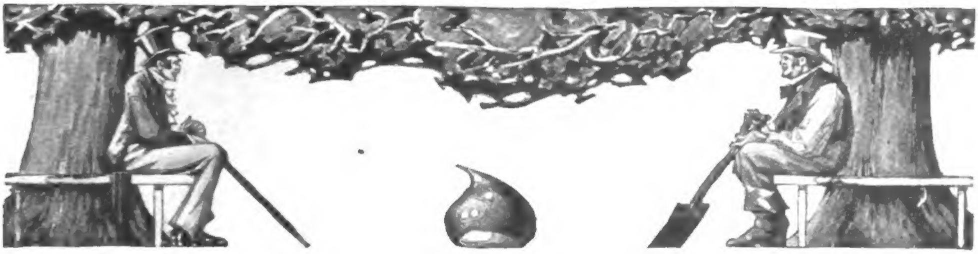
You can't have cream in your coffee this morning because Mary said it spoiled on her last night.

He lost half his potato crop because they sprouted on him.

Please excuse Johnny for being absent yesterday as we needed him home for sausage.

Ma wants to borrow a cup of lard off you.

Complaint received by a laundry from woman who insisted that they "lost her old man's shirt on her."



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

WHEN Samuel Hopkins Adams had worked for half an hour and could not start the family buzz-cart the other day, his wife, hearing the disturbance, came along and spoke kindly to Lizzie, who started immediately. Sam drove off, blushing furiously, while Channing Pollock tried to comfort him. But so mortified was Sam that he took a wrong road and had to turn in a very narrow place. When it had been accomplished, Pollock remarked admiringly,

"This bus of yours can turn around on a dime, Sam."

The irate purchaser of its gas and oil retorted savagely and ungrammatically:

"An' that ain't all it can do, Chan. It'll turn on its best friend!"

OLD Aunt Tillie was going into raptures over a baby daughter recently born unto another colored sister.

"What is you gwine name dis chile?" she finally asked.

"I done name her—her name's Hazel."

"Fer de Lawd's sake! You ain't name her dat? Wid all de good Bible names to pick from, you ain't name her a'ter a nut?"

A CASE tried not long ago in a Wyoming court gave the jury considerable difficulty. For hours they argued and disputed. Finally, however, they filed back into the courtroom and the foreman expressed their verdict as follows:

"We don't think he did it, for we figure that he wasn't there; but we do think he would have done it if he had had the chance."

ALLAN POLLOCK, when he came from England to play "A Bill of Divorcement," brought with him a rich fund of stories and anecdotes. One of these is of a London dealer in antiques who made a sale of a grandfather clock. Having no one to deliver it, for it was war-time and all his employees were at the front, he shouldered the unwieldy timepiece at nightfall and set out for the purchaser's home.

On the way he came into sudden and somewhat violent collision with a man, who was knocked down. The dealer thereupon stood his burden against a railing and went to the assistance of the victim of his awkwardness. This proved to be an American sailor, and, as we had recently entered the war, the poor antique-man was the more distressed that the mishap should have occurred to one of his country's most valued allies. With profuse and elaborate apologies he helped the sailor to his feet and began to brush him off, all of which made little impression on the gob, who looked around and, seeing the clock, recognized the object that had felled him.

"Is that thing yours?" he demanded.

The dealer admitted that it was.

"Well, why in blazes don't you wear a wrist-watch?"

AN IRISHMAN, who had bored his friends by endlessly reiterating his disbelief in the hereafter, died, and an old friend came to view the remains, which were laid out in his best clothes.

"Poor old Pat!" said the friend feelingly. "All dressed up and nowhere to go."

FOUR persons—a genial American, a very grouchy Englishman and two women—chanced, one wintry morning, to be the occupants of a compartment on the day express from Paddington to Plymouth. The train had barely pulled out of the London terminal when one of the women asked the American to open the window. He made a move to comply with the request; whereupon the other woman set up a cry:

"Don't—don't open that window! The cold wind—the damp air will give me my death!"

The American hesitated, and the first woman exclaimed:

"But I must have fresh air! I'll suffocate—I'll die if I can't get it!"

The perplexed man glanced at his male fellow voyager, who was reading his paper and apparently not the least interested in the controversy. Nevertheless, he felt that
dvice, so he asked,
I do?"
ing up, the Englishman re-

"I'd open the window till one of them dies, and then I would shut it."

WORKMEN were making repairs on the wires in an Idaho schoolhouse one Saturday when a small boy wandered in.

"What you doin'?" he asked.

"Installing an electric switch," one of the men replied.

The boy then volunteered:

"I don't care. We've moved away, and I don't go to this school any more."

"**THERE** had been a brilliant ceremony in my town," said an Ohio man, "in connection with a corner-stone laying. Everything went off nicely—the music was impressive, the speeches were eloquent. The result was that the master of ceremonies was very much pleased with himself—that is, until the last of the crowd had gone. Then he evinced signs of excitement bordering on panic. Hurriedly he sought out the master mason.

" 'Would it be possible,' he asked breathlessly, 'to lift the corner-stone again?'

" 'I am afraid it would not,' replied the workman, surprised. 'Why do you ask?'

" 'I have a very special reason; I have left my hat in the receptacle along with the records.' "

MOST people who have met Mr. Cosmo Hamilton are aware that his stories are not exactly dull. The other night, at the Lotos Club, New-York, he vouched for the truth of the following:

Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who, as might be suspected from a perusal of "Back to Methuselah," is a victim of dyspepsia, was preparing his lunch at the Garrick Club in London. It consisted of brown bread and cod-liver oil. Sir James Barrie came in and sat down by his side at the long table. His attention was caught by Mr. Shaw's strange efforts, and after watching him for a moment, he said to him,

"Tell me, Shaw; have you eaten that or are you going to?"

AT A dinner given in Boston to members of the American Medical Association, the first two speakers were Bostonians. Both prefaced their remarks with glowing tributes to the city. They told of its place in the history of the country, of the illustrious men who had lived or were still living there, its culture and so forth. The third speaker was from Chicago.

"I have been not only interested but surprised at what my colleagues have had to say about their city," he began. "I say 'surprised,' because, where I come from, Boston is noted for two things—its beans and its has-beens."

WHEN the new clerk went to work in the drug store, it was a signal for the town's wags to begin their practical jokes. Among the many things he was asked for, in the absence of the proprietor, was potato seed. He explained, after a search, that they were sold out, and inquired about it when his employer returned. The employer explained what had been put over on him.

The next day a lady came into the store and asked for some bird-seed.

"Aw, go on," he said, with a wise grin; "yer can't kid me. Birds is hatched from aigs."

"**MRS.** SUBURBS just telephoned that she wants a cook, and wants her bad," the employment-office clerk reported.

"Well now," the manager replied delightedly, "that's just the sort of client I like to hear from—one that asks for the kind of thing you are able to supply."